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THE

MAID OF FLORENCE;

OR,

NICCOLÒ DE' LAPI.

BY

THE MARQUIS MASSIMO D'AZEGLIO,
EX-PRIME-MINISTER OF SARDINIA.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY
W. FELGATE, A.M.

> Videbis, fili mi, quam parva sapientia regitur mundus.
> OXENSTIERN.
> Sunt lacrymæ rerum ; et mentem mortalia tangunt.
> VIRGIL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
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CHAPTER I.

The night that followed on this stormy day was, to the Florentines, one full of anxiety, alarm, and hurried preparations, in anticipation of the grave events, which they foresaw for the morrow. In those hours when, especially during the hot season, sleep usually overcomes all care and sorrow, and buries the memory of every trouble, Florence was awake and busy. In the streets, indeed, not a soul was to be seen, but the lights in every window, the sounds and voices, that were heard within the houses, showed plainly, that the unhappy inhabitants felt conscious, that the last scene of this long and bloody tragedy was approaching; and that, in their hearts, were still glowing, with more intensity than ever, the animosities and passions of party; and hopes and aspirations, now about to be gratified, or for ever disappointed.

The lower class, the greater part of the citizens that is, who, on such occasions are wont to give their services cordially and sincerely, without any ulterior objects and without reserve; and who, therefore, for this very reason, often become tools to serve the purposes of knaves and hypocrites, were busily engaged, during the night, in preparing to make a bold stand on the next day, in what would be their last and decisive appeal to arms; with sanguine hopes of victory, and ready to purchase it with the sacrifice of their lives. Glorious would have been the spectacle, could one have looked in, on what was quietly going forward in those poor abodes, to see the preparations that were making for this last struggle; to see those men calmly resolving to die for their country. And for what objects? with what hopes? To change their condition, and if victorious, to become rich? No; their condition, they well knew, admitted of no change; poverty and labour would be their lot in any case. But they made no calculations of this sort; they did not even think of them; they loved their country, as a mother is loved; they loved her for love's sake; it had been the first thought of their infancy, it would be the last of their old age; they gave their life for her with the self-same feelings, that a lover sacrifices his life for the object of his affections, seeking no other reward, but the pleasure of dying to save her.

How loud, how fervent, that night, must have been the prayers of mothers and of wives! What tears shed in secret! What vows, what supplications to God, poured forth from innocent souls, bereft of all hope but in Him! The imagination is bewildered, in attempting to picture to itself the infinite variety of circumstances, that the interior of the different houses must have presented; in endeavouring to form an idea of the stern exhortations of the old men, the sanguine and confident hopes of the young, the honourable and inflexible resolution of all; but the heart shudders to think, that at that very time, there were in Florence, citizens up and awake, planning how they might escape, alone, from the general ruin; how they might purchase their lives at the price of treachery, and save their riches at the expense of the blood and liberty of their fellow-citizens.

There were indeed too many such, of the class of the nobles, on whom Malatesta reckoned, and whom Troilus and Nobili had been commissioned, as we have seen, to seduce. In this service they experienced few obstacles, as matters were already ripe, and self-interest prevailed over every other consideration with men, who had at first, however, shown themselves ardent and zealous in the common cause. But they were rich, and had much to lose; and Niccolo, in distrusting them, had not been far wrong.

Troilus and Nobili then, upon leaving Malatesta, went round and visited these nobles, one by one; and, according to circumstances, with persuasions and promises, more or less direct, they succeeded in drawing them off from the popular cause, and bringing them over to those views, which they in the end adopted, and which were the cause of the final ruin of their country.

The night having been so spent, the dawn, desired, or dreaded, as the case might be, but certainly watched for with anxiety by all, at length appeared, clear and bright, behind the hills of Incontro and Vallombrosa. When its rays began to beam into the cottages, and to make themselves visible in spite of the ruddy light of their lamps, in every family there was, what was looked upon as a final leave-taking; embraces and tears, and the last fond and hasty interviews of husbands and wives succeeded, mingled with the blessings of fathers and old men; and then, by little and little, the noise and bustle of the city increased; there was a deep hum of voices, the trampling of footsteps, the sound of the opening and shutting of doors; and the citizens sallying forth armed, to join their respective standards, exchanged their last farewell, their last looks with their relatives, with their wives and children, whom they left weeping at the door.

At sunrise the great square was already crowded with people, just as it was the day before; and the lords commissioners were assembled in council, when there was observed, coming in that direction, a troop of horsemen, with Cencio Guercio at their head, and directing their course to the palace. Arrived at the gate, and making his way along amid the waving masses, and the not very friendly murmurs of the crowd, he dismounted; and going up into the chamber, where the council were assembled, he delivered, in an arrogant tone, the message with which he had been charged by Malatesta.

This traitor had been losing no time during the night any more than the rest; and knowing the universal opposition, which was greater than ever, to a surrender, and that they were resolved to try the issue of an engagement once more, he had sent the above-named Cencio, with another, to the camp to Don Ferrante; from whom they returned with a draught of the conditions for a surrender, by which it was stipulated, in substance, that the Medici should be restored indeed, but the city remain free. With this draught, Cencio came therefore to the Seigniory, adding:—That Malatesta advised them to accept the terms, and admonished them, since matters were now in a hopeless state, not to give Florence over to utter ruin, —adding much more, in so insolent a tone, that the Gonfalonier was half inclined to chastise his audacity. The Seigniory, too late aware of their error in entrusting themselves to that villain, who now so shamelessly revealed his treachery, hearing too the cries that resounded in the square beneath, and the shouts of the people clamorous for battle, dismissed Cencio, in terms no less haughty than his own; charging him to tell Malatesta (we copy the words of Varchi): "That the Council, in order "to put an end, once for all, to this so often pro- "posed and settled subject of deliberation, had "again determined, as their final resolution, to "fight by all means; wherefore, they as Seignors "commanded him, and as citizens entreated him, "for his own honour and their safety, to prepare "to lead out his own men, because they, on their "part, were ready, and had everything required "and enjoined by him, prepared to his orders."

Malatesta meanwhile, full of anxiety and alarm, and strengthening the guards about his person, which were composed of his own Perugians, and of Corsican soldiers who were devoted to him, was awaiting the reply from the palace; at one time threatening, at another soothing his men, and trying to ensure their fidelity. When Cencio reported to him the reply of the Seignors, knowing he had no other resource, he determined, as he had resolved, to resign his post of Captain-General, sooner than obey an order that might involve the loss of all the advantages to be derived from his villanies. Not that he thought his resignation would be accepted; on the contrary, he hoped by this means to overcome the resolution of the Florentines, and compel them, on finding themselves without a leader, to give in to the terms of surrender.

He therefore addressed a letter to the Seigniory, couched in obscure terms and misty sentences (for a clear and intelligible statement he could not make), with a view to show that he had honourably and faithfully discharged his duty as captain-general, and done his utmost to free the city from the siege; the result had proved that his counsel, not to go outside the walls to fight, had been good, and he held to that opinion more than ever, now that their forces had been so diminished by their tremendous losses, and were become so inferior to those of the enemy; that his feelings would not allow him to consent to the utter ruin of so noble a city by adopting a contrary opinion; and since the Seigniory had determined on this course, he would rather resign his office and depart.

Stefano Colonna, whom Malatesta had, by his address, won over that day not only not to oppose, but even to abet him, was rather inclined to favour him, either because such were his orders from the French king whose officer he was, or for some other reason; however, so it was, he too subscribed his name to this protest, and they despatched it as soon as written to the palace.

The indignation and fury that the reading of it provoked among the Seignors, inflamed by the discovery they now made of the villainous spirit of this traitor, it is impossible to describe: without a moment's delay, and in a frenzy of anger, they proposed the resolution, which was carried unanimously, to accept Malatesta's resignation. A reply was written immediately, in which, without condescending to recrimination and complaints, which would have ill consisted with the dignity of the Republic, his request was complied with, in terms more respectful than he deserved. Andreolo Niccolini and Francesco Zati, both commissaries, were charged to convey this document to Malatesta, and took with them Paolo da Calignano, a notary, to make a public attestation of it.

The populace, who were waiting impatiently for the conclusion of their deliberations, saw three mules led up to the gate by officers of the Seigniory, and presently the above-named commissaries came forth, and having mounted, they set out, preceded by two mace-bearers, amid the whisperings of the crowd, amongst whom there already ran a report of their important and extraordinary mission.

They arrived at the top of Maggio Street, where the first body of Malatesta's guards were posted, who made way for them to pass; but with insolent words and leering eyes gave them to understand, what sort of reception they were likely to receive from the Captain-General. Having at last dismounted in the court-yard, they ascended the stairs, and found him in the room in which he usually gave audiences, sitting on a chair, surrounded by his body-guard, with a louring and haughty countenance, which showed no alteration at the approach of the commissaries, to whose salutation he scarcely deigned to reply, by a slight inclination of the head.

If these men felt no fear at finding themselves in the power of so many enemies, as they might now be called, at seeing the sinister expression on the faces of those ill-disposed ruffians, and knowing too, the sort of message they were charged with, they must have been men of bold spirit. They proceeded to discharge their commission fearlessly; and Niccolino, taking the document from his pocket, began to read it in a loud voice. But he had scarcely pronounced the first words, when

Malatesta, rising up in a rage, made a rush at him, and drawing his poniard from the sheath, he inflicted on him several very bad wounds, and would have killed him, had not his attendants, considering the enormity of such conduct, and perhaps, still more, fearing the consequences, stayed his hand; or, rather, had not the weakness of his arm rendered his blows less deadly and effectual. Zati's courage failed for a moment, at seeing his companion so served, and begged his life of Malatesta, who, blinded by rage, was making also towards him, but he restrained himself from doing him any injury.

Owing to this commotion there arose a violent uproar throughout the whole house, in the court-yard and in the street; and the soldiers (who at that time, on every slight tumult, at once thought only of plunder) carried off the silver maces of the mace-bearers, the mules, and even the cloak of the wounded commissary, who having been removed thence by Alamanno de Pazzi, received from him the kindest treatment; and also, by his care, had his wounds dressed. All this time Malatesta, whom rage and fury, and the fear that he might have to sacrifice in a moment all his long cherished hopes, had deprived of his senses, was storming about, and vociferating:—that Florence was not to be made a stable of, and that he would save it in spite of the traitors.—

The commotion and uproar continued, and it was now plain to everybody, that matters were come to that pass, that force alone could decide who was to be master in Florence, the Seigniory or Malatesta. The latter indeed was not so blinded by rage, as not to know, that it was no time for talking and vain-boasting, but for prompt and vigorous action.

Meanwhile Zati and the notary had returned, with the despoiled mace-bearers, to the public square; and the people saw them pass on their way to the palace, with some astonishment; but scarcely were they informed of what had happened, than there arose a murmur of indignation, and cries for vengeance, so deep and loud, that the hills and valleys of the Arno re-echoed with the sound. The Gonfalonier in a fury, swearing that he would avenge, at any cost, the offended dignity of the Republic, called to his sergeants to bring his arms, and to get ready his horse, that at the head of all the people, he might march against Malatesta, and see, as he said, whether such a traitor could maintain himself alone against the whole of Florence. The order was instantly obeyed. His arms were brought, and to the gate was led a stately war-horse, richly caparisoned and all covered with the Florentine lily. The people at the sight of these preparations began hastily to fall into their ranks; you might see the crowd moving about, and the people separating, and threading their way amidst the confused mass, to go and range themselves under their respective gonfalons, preparing their arms, and borrowing a light for the cords of their arquebusses from one another: and during all this bustle you could distinguish a deep and rumbling sound of voices, which resembled the subterranean murmur which precedes an earthquake. All at once the tolling of the great bell was heard, increasing, or rather drowning all this uproar; that bell which had many a time, in like circumstances, struck the last hour of traitors; the deep, sonorous vibrations of the loud-tongued monster, booming forth amid the crowd, struck upon every heart, and kindled fresh ardour in all who heard it, just as the war-horse is excited by the flourish of the trumpet; for those sounds, at such a moment of extreme danger, seemed like the voice of the country, calling upon her children and imploring their aid.

Amongst the gonfalons of the various quarters, which, ranged around the square, were fluttering in the wind, not the least conspicuous was the golden Lion of St. John; and in the first rank, stood Niccolo with his sons. The stern old man, deaf to all entreaties, unmoved by the tears of his daughters and the persuasions of his friends, insisted, on this occasion, on joining the rest, when the final doom of Florence was about to be decided. If not with his arms, at least he thought, and rightly too, he could aid by his example; and what foot could draw back, what heart waver, in presence of the dauntless courage and intrepid bearing of this venerable man?

Having laid aside the lucco, he had put on a glittering coat of mail; his sword hung at his side, in his hand he bore a lance, and instead of the cappuccio, he wore an iron casque, beneath which streamed forth his honoured, hoary locks, and hung down on his neck; whilst his descending beard, of no less silvery whiteness, covered his breast. His frame, but little bent by age, stood erect and vigorous; and his legs still appeared firmly planted on the ground, and preserving their well-proportioned shape; his eye glistened with the fire of youth, and an unusual flush tinged his cheeks. In spite of the agitating thoughts, that filled their minds, many could not help looking intently at him, and pointing him out to their companions, with words full of admiration and respectful affection. He himself, all the while, was glancing round with calm and haughty eye, in which might be read the resolute purpose of his soul. And as he stood there, the waving shadow of the pennon that floated above his head, at one moment swept over him, obscuring the glitter of his arms; at another, fluttering in the breeze, permitted them to gleam again in the rays of the sun.

On the tribune in front of the palace, now appeared the Gonfalonier, equipped in complete armour; and mounting his horse, he advanced, preceded by the great flag of state; the people, in admirable order, according to their quarters, ranged themselves in their ranks to follow him. The trumpets of the Seigniory sounded; the bells of the palace, and those of several churches, were ringing; and the cries passed along of—*Viva il Palagio! Death to the traitors! Death to Malatesta!*—The earth appeared to tremble beneath the trampling of so many feet; the walls shook with the reverberation of so many voices, and with the rattling of the armour of this crowded host, and the heavy rolling of the gun-carriages, which were being dragged through the streets, to batter down, if necessary, the walls and gates of Malatesta's palace.

But Malatesta, foreseeing the dangers that threatened him, had already provided himself with the last and most shameful means of defence, that remained to him; and which was at the same time the most certain and terrible, that could have been devised; and against which the Florentines had no remedy. The traitor had placed Pirro Stippicciano of Castel di Piero in the bastions, with his own troops, and ordered Margutte of Perugia to take up a position at the gate of San Pier Gattolini; which he furiously assailed and broke in pieces, driving before him Captain Altoviti, who was stationed there to guard it, and at the same time turning on the city the guns that were ranged on the tower above the gate. The Imperialists, informed of these movements by Malatesta, had in the meantime run to their arms and were ready, upon his signal, to rush down, and enter the city; and the ferocious bands of Germans and Spaniards, brandishing their pikes, were uttering cries of joy, considering that the sack of Florence was now about to take place, and gloating over their expected rapine and slaughter, the pillaging and ravishing, which was the goal of their long-deferred and often baffled hopes.

Malatesta thus secured in his retreat, and now backed by the whole Imperial army, could, as far as he himself was concerned, laugh at the fury of the populace; but one very important consideration weighed with him, not to push matters to extremities, but so to manage, that the people should retire without his calling in any assistance from the Imperialists; and this, solely account of his fears with respect to the latter. This consideration was the certainty, that if the Imperialists entered Florence, and a contest arose in the city, they would sack and destroy it, contrary to the declared wishes of the Pope, who gave orders for its preservation, and for that of the riches that still remained in it. Malatesta therefore despatched to meet this vast body of Florentines, some of his officers; who, encountering them at the Ponte Vecchio, told the Gonfalonier and the Signors, that if they advanced a step further, the whole Imperial army would be admitted within the walls; and some of the citizens, who had witnessed the occupation of the gate of San Pier Gattolini, certified the fact; and assured them, that it really was in Malatesta's power to put his threats in execution; and at the same time, going up to the Seignors and those of the people, who were in the foremost ranks, and taking the hands first of one, and then of another, exhorting, imploring, and even weeping, they urged upon the crowd to retire, and not to tempt heaven and fortune, by an undertaking so vain and hopeless, and one that was sure to produce universal ruin and destruction. But in the breasts of men so inflamed, rage could not yield so readily to reason; and the message of Malatesta, exciting more than ever the general indignation, exasperated rather than allayed their thirst for vengeance, and their eagerness for the assault; but then so earnest, and so positive was the language of those citizens, who had attempted to act as mediators, and so clear was the evidence, that no power in the world could now save their miserable country, that at last the Gonfalonier and Seignory sorrowfully and despairing of any succour, cursing their fate and the cruelty of the Pope, and the traitors who had been the instruments of it, gave orders to the people to turn back, and disband.

This stoppage at the head of the crowd on the Ponte Vecchio, created throughout the whole mass an ebbing movement, and you could see that sort of undulating motion run through it, similar to that which is communicated to the circular rings in the bodies of worms; and at the same time there was conveyed to the rear, from mouth to mouth, the tidings of the obstacle, that had presented itself. At first it was repeated without variation or addition, but by-and-by, in its progress it underwent strange transformations; and at last, amidst whispers of terror, which became more and more startling, it was declared on all sides, that the enemy had entered Florence, and that all the city on the other side of the river was in the power of the Imperialists, who had already commenced murdering and pillaging.

From the extreme of boldness, the multitude generally passes to the extreme of alarm, and the more so, when they find themselves threatened by an unknown danger, against which they can devise no means of defence, and which is therefore magnified by their imaginations beyond its real proportions.

To their care for the public welfare now succeeded that of self-preservation; and to those citizens, who now despaired of their country's safety, the thought recurred of their wives, of their children and households; every one called to mind those dearest to him, who had been left defenceless at home; every one was already picturing them to himself outraged and ill-treated by the German and Spanish soldiery. To hasten to their defence was the thought uppermost in every heart, and this thought in a few moments considerably thinned their crowded ranks.

The citizens ran helter skelter through the streets, the squares, and the alleys; every one thinking it an age, before he regained his own home, and dreading to find it already broken into, and the Imperialist soldiers in possession. With dejected looks, and beating hearts, and eyes filled with tears, every one, according to his disposition, was either looking upward to Heaven, and with broken petitions imploring its aid, or was uttering fearful and blasphemous imprecations. Some again were railing against the pope; others against the Friar Jerome, calling him an impostor, and cursing him for having deceived them. And the alarm, by degrees, spreading from house to house, there arose a universal wailing, women and children everywhere crying. Those who were left alone at home, not seeing their husbands reappear, and boding all sorts of misfortunes, thinking they must certainly have been killed, and at the same time hearing the cries and lamentations of their neighbours, went fairly out of their mind, and wildly seizing their younger children in their arms, and dragging after them the elder ones, who in the utmost terror held fast by their mother's gown, rushed out of their houses, and roaming through the streets, sought for some church, in which to take refuge; and depositing their little ones on the altar steps, with their arms crossed, and fancying every moment they felt the grasp of a soldier's hand in their hair, were calling upon God for pity.

Nor could all the members of a family avail themselves, however desirous of doing so, of the protection furnished by the sanctuaries; for in many families, of course, there were some sick or wounded, confined to their beds, and old men whose feeble age rendered them incapable of moving or helping themselves. From this arose a fresh and more painful struggle, between their desire to save those who could fly, and their distress at abandoning those, whom it would have required many pairs of arms and much time to convey away. And these various circumstances gave rise to astonishing acts of courage, of tenderness, and of filial duty; in which, their hearty zeal communicated superhuman strength to feeble and delicate frames; and young women were seen bearing on their shoulders a father or a mother, unable to move of themselves, and bringing them, all out of breath and exhausted, and laying them at the steps of some church; whence, by some pitying hand they were taken up, and deposited at the foot of the altar. Along with these noble acts might be seen others, that were cruel and unnatural; and in many mothers their fears and anxiety for their children, extinguishing every other feeling, they left their houses open, and abandoned all thought of those they left within, who were unable to follow them. And in some cases it happened, that robberies and murders were committed on those poor forsaken people, not by the soldiers of the enemy, but by the dregs of the people in the city itself. By-and-by, those citizens who, upon returning home, found their houses empty, and their terrified family fled, were running about inquiring for them of the neighbours, or searching for them in the streets. When they found them again, partly reproving, partly bewailing their hasty and inconsiderate flight, they brought them back to their homes; for by the care of the Seigniory, the city was somewhat reassured as to the immediate danger of the sack, and there had been posted at every bridge a company of soldiers to prevent any sudden attack from the opposite bank of the Arno; so that with many, their hasty alarm had given place to new hopes; and amongst the people, who had now reassembled in the public square, though neither so numerous nor so bold as before, many cries were heard, again clamouring for battle. But there were also not a few, demanding that the conditions of surrender should be accepted; and then again, there were others who, setting a higher value upon their country and liberty, than on their lives, crowding round the image of the Lion, which was at one corner of the palace, embraced those rugged stones, which formed its basement, bathed them with their tears, and covered them with kisses, and swore they would defend that venerated emblem of the republic to the last, and die a thousand deaths sooner than desert it.

Where could Niccolo have been but here, the foremost of all, and the most zealous? Could he, even at this forlorn moment, admit a single doubt of the fall of Florence? Could he believe Father Jerome an impostor, and his prophecies a delusion?

Standing at the feet of the Lion, surrounded by his sons and a crowd of people, he was, by his powerful and eloquent address, gradually communicating to every heart the faith and constancy, that still remained unshaken in his own; and even when the sun began to decline in the west, and when at last, having sunk beneath the horizon, the stars began to peep out, not even then would he leave the spot, notwithstanding the pressing entreaties of his friends, who could not bear to think that he should endure such discomfort. He was afraid that during the night a fresh crisis might arise, or that the Palleschi might take occasion to create a disturbance and form some plots or other against the state, so that he obstinately refused to go home; and influenced by his example, many other citizens also passed the night in the street. It is easy to imagine what sort of night it must have been to them; how distressing, how full of suspense and dread with respect to the impending dangers, which they were looking forward to on the morrow; and how drearily it must have passed away, when, after midnight, a deep silence succeeded to the previous uproar, and not a sound was heard, but the step of the sentinels, the screeching of the owls upon the top of the tower, and the striking of the city clocks. Niccolo, yielding to fatigue, began to droop his head, as he reclined on a bed composed of his sons' cloaks, and fell asleep with his head resting on the base of the statue, whilst they, pensive and silent, watched by his side. Two hours before day, the moon which was on the wane, gradually paling her decreasing light, illuminated with her silver rays the countenance of the old man, as he lay sleeping. Lambert had gently taken off his iron casque, and in order to shelter him from the damp night-air, had drawn over his head the lappet of one of the cloaks; and the calm and placid serenity that was diffused over Niccolo's features, his long and deep breathing, showed that on the bare earth, in the midst of the direst misfortunes, and the greatest dangers, sleep and tranquillity are not denied to the brave and good man.—We cannot affirm, that on that night, and during those self-same hours, Charles V. and Clement VII. enjoyed a like repose in their beds of down, richly decked with silk and gold.

A fresh cause of disquietude, the result however of long and deep-laid schemes, arose to precipitate and embitter the final struggles of the Republic. The class of the nobles having definitively resolved to separate from the rest of the people, assembled, all armed, at the break of day on the square of San Spirito, to the number of about four hundred young men, belonging to the first families in Florence, "despising (according to the words of Varchi) the religious obligation of their oath, which they had so many times sworn, on the most solemn occasions."

They chose this spot from its being close to Malatesta's residence, and because they could, if necessary, aid him, and receive aid in their turn. To force upon the Seignory the acceptance of the conditions of surrender, and so to save their rank and riches, was the object they had in view. On hearing a rumour of these proceedings, Bernardo da Verrazzano, the commissary of the district, ran, and endeavoured with fair words, to bring them back to their duty, pointing out to them, of what importance it was, that in their danger the people should be united; and that thus they might obtain more reasonable terms, and such as were more favourable to the public welfare; whereas by division and disunion, they would but encourage the enemy, and render them more insolent and exacting. But his words were scattered to the wind; he was haughtily repulsed, and vile menaces were held out to him; and he was well-nigh being killed by Morticino de Antinori, who having taken aim at him with his arquebuss, was already applying the lighted cord to it, and would have fired, had he not been held back by those about him. The news of this defection having been conveyed to the palace, the Seignory, who now began to give up all as lost, and knew not what to do, amid the many and various dangers that threatened them, sent however, as a last effort, Rosso de Buondelmonti, commissary of the troops of Santa Maria Novella, to implore them, not to hasten the ultimate ruin of the State, using the very same arguments that had been fruitlessly advanced by Verrazzano; and which were in like manner heard a second time to no purpose; as they answered, that for the future, they recognised no other Seignory or Signor but Malatesta. Hereupon Buondelmonti, despairing of making any impression on them, betook himself to Malatesta, begging him on the part of the Seignory, that he would, by his authority, cause these young men to quit the square of San Spirito. Whether this request was complied with, the reader may imagine; for

Malatesta had already sent to these nobles, buoying them up with his usual promises of an aristocratic constitution, such as they were ambitious of, and offering his services to aid and assist them; and so he at last explicitly declared to the commissary, that he sided with the party of San Spirito, and regarded them as the representatives of the city.

This defection of the nobles, although owing to their small number it appeared of slight importance, was however the blow that finally decided the doom of the Republic of Florence; just as in felling an old and firmly rooted oak; when after the strokes of numerous axes it begins to totter, and is well-nigh cut through at the stump, a very slight impulse is, at last, sufficient to bring it to the ground.

These young nobles now came into the great square, and assuming a tone of overbearing arrogance, ranged themselves under the Tetto de Pisani, all armed, and looking with scowling eyes on the Piagnoni, who stood opposite them, drawn up beneath the tribune: and if, as seemed likely, they had come to an open rupture, heaven only knows the ruin they would have brought on the city; but the ranks of the popular party had been considerably thinned, for many had dropped off by degrees, feeling that to contend against their fate any longer, would be a useless sacrifice; and would be, not dying for their country, but rather bringing about their country's ruin by their obstinate perseverance.

CHAPTER II.

These young nobles, finding that they were now masters of Florence, demanded, as the first thing, that the Seigniory should release those Palleschan citizens, who had been confined ever since the commencement of the siege in the palace; and the Seigniory, who had no alternative but to obey, as they were now no longer able to command, at once set them at liberty; and they were soon seen issuing forth from the palace thanking their liberators, as they presently after thanked Malatesta, to whom they went to pay their respects. Busini, who was present on that occasion, and remained faithful to the few Piagnoni who still held out, more ambitious to die than to live, tells, in one of his letters to Varchi, that these men having, during their imprisonment, neglected all care of their person, came forth with very long beards, and looked just like the hermits of Falterona.

The Seignors, therefore, having no other course before them, urged by necessity and the violence of the nobles, and now left entirely to themselves, were obliged at last to adopt the resolution of surrendering; and having assembled the council of eighty in the great hall of the palace, in the very room, which by the advice of Savonarola had been fitted up for the Great Council, and in which several years after, Vasari painted, in so many historic pictures, the battles which riveted the slavery of Florence; being here assembled, I say, weighed down with sorrow, and oppressed with that profound and silent grief, which can very well be imagined, they elected four ambassadors to Don Ferrante, charged with the offer of surrender, on the one condition, that the liberty of Florence should be preserved inviolate.

This single stipulation will appear to the reader a bitter mockery, and the course of events will show that his judgment is not wrong; but it is the nature of mankind to cling with the greatest obstinacy to words, when that which they are intended to express has ceased to have any meaning.

The ambassadors set out, and proceeding to the Guicciardini villa, where Baccio Valori had his quarters, they were admitted to a conference with him and Don Ferrante; after a prolonged discussion, they settled the articles of the capitulation, and returned with them at night-fall to Florence.

Niccolo, although abandoned by almost all, had still continued out in the great square, at the same spot. When he was told that it was all over, that their last hope was extinct, and Florence had finally fallen into the hands of the Palleschi, he gave himself up to that hopeless grief, which far surpasses every other kind; which is not to be put in comparison, either with the loss of property or of life, no, nor even of liberty, springing, as it does, from a loss much more terrible for man, that of a faith, that has been held and cherished as sacred and infallible, during the course of an entire life. To find the friend of our childhood faithless, is, perhaps, the only grief which makes any approach to it.

Who can imagine, much less describe, the terrible shock that must have been communicated to the mind of the aged patriot, when all on a sudden, as if a veil had been torn from his eyes, he felt a doubt flash across his mind, that Father Jerome had deceived him? At the age of fourscore-and-ten the unhappy old man learnt, that he was not yet acquainted with all the woes of human life; and whilst his relatives stood around, endeavouring to comfort him, and anxiously noting the rapid and alarming change that appeared in his features, —that brow, those eyes, which a moment ago were calm and serene, drooped downwards, and his pallid countenance exhibited such desolate despair, that the bystanders were for some few moments afraid he would drop down dead on the spot; whilst each, with such words and such arguments as he could devise, endeavoured to animate him, and gently strove to lead him in the direction of his home. They succeeded in conducting him thither, slowly wending their way through those streets, which but lately were thronged with people, and filled with cries and shouts, but were now dark, silent, and deserted; save that, from time to time, were heard stifled sobs and lamentations, which arose in different directions; but whence, they could not tell. When Niccolo saw the dark front of his own house, where he had lived free for so many years, and where he must henceforth live a slave, or quit it, he felt his grief rekindled with tenfold bitterness; just as is the case with those who revisit, for the first time, the abode in which they have lived for long years with one they loved, but whom death has snatched away from them for ever. As he crossed the threshold, and was about to enter into his own apartment, he felt his heart sink within him, as if he were entering a prison. He found his daughters in tears; they came forward to receive him, and as they embraced him, their sobs rose in a louder strain; whilst he, neither repelling, nor responding to, their mute expressions of sympathetic sorrow, proceeded to strip off his armour, and hurled it from him on the ground, but casting on it one last sad look; another look he cast upward, towards the niche in which hung the robe, and in which were laid up the ashes of Savonarola, and without turning away his eyes from those objects, which, at such a moment, were calculated to awake in him a crowd of thoughts, he remained for some time quite absorbed. At last, the miserable old man, in the presence of his family, who in deep dejection were standing around him, burst into tears, and wept long and bitterly.

The failure of prophecies is usually attributed to anything and everything, rather than to the prophets; for faith being an affection of the heart, rather than an operation of the intellect, the heart obstinately clings to it, and defends it against the assaults of reason, and the evidence of the senses themselves; and with respect to predictions, there are never wanting pretexts for men to persuade themselves, when the events have turned out contrary to what they were foretold, that the fault lay with those who did not know how to interpret them aright, or to fulfil the conditions on which they depended. So Niccolo, unable, in a moment, to abandon his faith in Father Jerome, who had been the animating spirit of his life; unable all at once to detest what he had hitherto adored, and to renounce, at this terrible conjuncture, the only consolation, the only hope that remained to him, said to himself, as he gazed on those relics: "And if our sins were such, as to render us undeserving of the divine compassion, shall we, in order to fill up the measure of them, lose our faith too? Victory was promised us; but have we fought? Why so basely retreat? Why surrender?—Can heaven help cowards? O Florence! in thine own strength hast thou trusted, and not in God's, and he has abandoned thee to thyself alone! *Quare, quare dubitasti?*"

These were the reflections, that drew tears from Niccolo, and at the same time served to renew in greater vigour that confidence, that might waver indeed, but could never be overthrown; so that resuming in his aspect and bearing that austere and sober gravity, which was usual with him, and which had been disconcerted only for a passing moment, he said to his sons, to Lambert and Troilus:—"My sons! to men less firm, and of less faith than yours, the words I am about to say to you might appear the silly fancies and ravings of an old man. But to you, who know the promises made by God, through the mouth of his Prophet, to this city—to you, who trust in them—to you, who (God be praised) know neither fear nor cowardice, I may indeed say, even at a time when so many look upon everything as lost—yes, I may say it to you—that all is not wholly and irrecoverably lost. No! to the man who despairs neither of God nor of himself, there always remains a path open to safety! Shall it be said that the entire people of Florence, that so many thousands of citizens have no longer any might in their arms, are no longer capable of defending themselves? And why? merely because some faint-hearted cowards chose to despair of the public safety, and to give themselves up into the hands of their country's enemies. Because four hundred nobles —(ah, Lambert! do you remember? did I not tell you so?)—have been base enough to trample their oaths under foot, and to turn traitors, is it for this, that we are no longer ourselves? no longer the same persons we were yesterday? Have our weapons lost their edge? Are we fewer in number? Are our enemies more? Yes, it is true; our number is diminished by four hundred traitors, who have gone to increase the forces of the Palleschi. But is it not a shame, a disgrace, that that should suffice to alarm a whole people, and cause their weapons to drop from their hands? Despair, who will! surrender, who will! I neither despair, nor will I surrender.—Ah, Ferruccio, Ferruccio! thou hast shown us, indeed, what it is to fight! And we, in a city full of armed men, with strong and unbreached walls! Oh, shame! everlasting shame! But up, this is no time for words, but for deeds; the hours flit away, the night is coming on. I would have us try our fortune once more, and God will aid us. Go out into the city, and seek out our workmen, the poor labourers. Ah, there are no traitors among them!—in these men, and not in the nobles, consists the strength of our city—and let us all meet at St. Mark's after midnight, and there we will determine on what steps to take; there we shall see, whether there are still any men in Florence. I shall await you there; let every one come to the door at the back of the garden; I will give directions, that they shall open the gate to whoever shall say—*St. Mark and liberty.* Now go, and lose no time."

The courageous young men joyfully undertook the task, and set out, quite revived by the thought, that there was yet something that might be done. As soon as they got outside, they separated; each one going to seek out those, with whom he was best acquainted, and on whom he placed the greatest reliance; and Niccolo, leaving his daughters bathed in tears, and filled with the dread of unknown dangers and fresh sorrows, directed his steps to St. Mark's.

Troilus had gone out with the rest, apparently more anxious and more eager than any of them. But when he found himself alone, he stopped all at once, and shaking his head, exclaimed: "I declare this old fellow has the devil in him!—Why, I thought that I was at last fairly out of it. And here I am, just where I was!—He'll never rest, till we have sent him to his grave; and if he don't find fools to take up this mad freak, I verily believe, he'll go alone, and with his single lance make an attack on the camp."

Thus ruminating, he once more continued his way; and having crossed the bridge of Santa Trinita (which direction he had taken by chance) he bent his steps to Malatesta's quarters, to give him information of this new project.

The streets in all directions were full of soldiers, and citizens of the Palleschan party, coming and going, who, by their joyous countenances, their loud talking, and their unrestrained mirth, showed plainly the change that had taken place in their circumstances, and the ease and confidence they now felt. The court-yard and windows of the palace were resplendent with lights; within, all was bustle and excitement, crowds of people moving about; and it was abundantly manifest, that all who were collected here, thought of nothing but mirth and pleasure.

Troilus, having found a servant, sent word to Malatesta, that he had something of great importance to communicate. He had not to wait long, and was soon ushered into his presence. He was in a private cabinet, engaged with Baccio Valori in close confidence, and Troilus, as he entered, heard the latter say: "I'll not fail to write to His Holiness; but it's possible, he may think you exact too much—" These words referred to the immoderate demands, that Malatesta made of the pope, as the price of his betrayal of Florence.

They were silent on Troilus's entry, who could observe the countenances of both so changed from what they had hitherto been, that they scarcely seemed the same persons. The captain-general seemed less thin and shrivelled, and Baccio appeared to have had twenty years taken off him. They welcomed him with cordiality, though this feeling was not equally sincere in both; as, after the victory, the several parts of these villains became all at once changed, and their interests could no longer jump together. Baccio saw the moment was come, when he would have all those upon him, who had worked to serve him, and to whom he had made such large promises; and if he wanted to keep the favour of Clement, and not to risk the loss of his own recompense, he very well knew, that the only way was that, recommended by Guido di Monforte to Boniface VIII, and expressed by Dante in the verse:—

> "Large promise with performance scant——"[*]

And how full of trouble and difficulty his task was likely to prove, the pretensions just put forward by Malatesta, plainly indicated; this was the subject of their conversation, when Troilus appeared. It was therefore natural, that his appearance, at such a moment, was not very agreeable to Valori; as when a man is contending with some inexorable creditor, the sudden apparition of another is not very gratifying. But Baccio was too wily, not to conceal his thoughts under a gracious exterior; whilst Malatesta, looking on Troilus as having, so to say, a common interest with himself, and therefore regarding him as an auxiliary, had no need to feign joy at seeing him.

Shaking him heartily by the hand, he said to him, turning slightly round towards Baccio: "This youth too has behaved capitally, and has shrunk neither from trouble nor from dangers—and if matters have turned out so much to the satisfaction of his Holiness, you have to thank him in no slight degree for it.—Tell me now, Troilus, did I give you bad advice, when I exhorted you to this undertaking? Art thou glad now, lad, eh?"

Baccio, with a forced smile, endeavoured to appear as if he quite acquiesced in Malatesta's observations; but in his heart, he devoutly wished him at the devil; whilst the captain-general continued: "Courage, my lad, all your sermonizings and processions and *misereres* are now at an end, and now you need no longer put on a grave face: as it is his Holiness's pleasure, that his servants, who have so efficiently aided him, should have the rewards they deserve. And Sir Baccio here, I am sure, will not fail to carry out the generous and munificent intentions of his master.—Besides, 'tis enough to say that the pope is of the house of the Medici, a family that is a stranger alike to ingratitude and parsimony."

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[*] Inferno, Canto xxvii. 27.—*Cary's Trans.*

Perhaps Malatesta, who was thoroughly acquainted with the disposition of Clement, and who penetrated the secret thoughts of Baccio, spoke thus, merely to irritate him; and Troilus, probably with a like object, replied:

" O yes, to be sure, I know all that, I know it; you have no occasion to tell me that.—And as to Sir Baccio, why, he has been my friend so long, that I feel certain, he takes more thought about my interests, than I do myself. But these are not the subjects, on which my head is running just now; as there is a new comedy now upon the stage, and I am come to give you notice of the performance."

Hereupon he told them, how that Niccolo, not yet considering himself as vanquished, was determined on making another attempt, and was actively engaged in rallying the Piagnone party, who were to meet that night, in St. Mark's convent, there to resolve on some mad and desperate scheme or other.

" Not that I think they can now do much damage," continued Troilus: " and besides, too, it remains to be seen, whether many fools will be found, in the present state of their affairs, mad enough to expose themselves to such a desperate venture. But yet I thought it a matter not to be neglected altogether, and it is of that I wished to give you intimation—especially since, as I am to be at this midnight meeting, I may be able to help matters."

"And well hast thou done, in giving us the tidings of it," replied Baccio; "for perhaps, perhaps—from this circumstance—it might happen—Let me think a moment."

Malatesta, seeing Baccio with his hand raised to his chin, his eye earnest and thoughtful, and apparently attaching great importance to the news he had just heard, said with a scornful smile:

"Why, what do you suppose these people will be able to do?—unless the angels should come down from heaven, as they fancied they would.—But that's a sight it would be rather amusing to see, for these angels would have to war with the pope! Good discipline, truly!"

Baccio, without attending to what had just been said, continued smoothing his chin with his hand; and thrusting out his under lip, shook his head, like one who is weighing and considering some important matter in his mind; and at last, as if he had hit upon the point he wanted, said:

"I am quite aware, that the Piagnoni can do us but little harm.—But what, if they could be made actually to serve our purposes? if with these wild schemes of theirs, they should forward our views instead, to obtain—to bring to pass—yes, I see—"

And breaking off what he was about to say, he began thinking again; whilst his hearers were looking on, expecting he would explain his new design. All three having remained silent for some time, Baccio at last said :

"Why, Sir Malatesta, the conditions are settled, the city is ours, I grant you.—But—between you and me—as no one hears what we say—are we equally sure of this army of ours? Are we sure, that their ideas will be the same as ours? that those Spanish and German devils, after eleven months' siege, after all their toils and hardships, will be willing to forego the sacking of Florence? that they will be satisfied with double pay, and go off quietly and without doing any mischief to the city? And if they should be resolved on pillage, who is to hinder or restrain them? The prince is dead; Gian d'Urbino is dead; and Don Ferrante, what influence has he with these brigands? And if Florence should be given over to sack and pillage, you know, as well as I, what thanks we are like to meet with from the Pope. You, Sir Malatesta, may calculate (let us speak plainly) on never seeing Perugia again; I, that I shall be sent about my business to lead the life of a beggar, God knows where; and as for Troilus, I'll not say a word about him—"

Baccio's words, which intimated what was highly probable in itself, made a considerable impression on the minds of his two listeners; who would have done anything in the world, rather than risk the loss of the rewards on which they counted.

"Well, now listen to me," Baccio went on to say. "The camp, so long as it is united and animated by a single object, will be too strong for us; but if I'm not mistaken, 'twill be no hard matter for us to set them by the ears.—Let us set them quarrelling amongst themselves, and they'll be only too glad to save their lives—anything will then run in their heads but entering Florence.—You will perhaps ask me, how we are to effect this?—This is just what I want Niccolo and his Piagnoni to help me in.—Eh!" continued Baccio, with a smile of self-satisfaction; "only let me have a minute or so to think about it, and I lay, that I extricate myself and others out of this perplexity."

And the old villain, quite pleased with his own schemes, shook his head and laughed. Then turning to Troilus, he detailed his project to him with the utmost minuteness, and instructed him very precisely on the measures he was to take that night, at the meeting of the Piagnoni; and at last, he added with his malicious grin:

"And should this matter turn out well, there is another advantage—just remember how many gratuities less we shall have to pay down.—Am I a good steward of my master's goods, eh?"

"I stand before you, cap in hand," said Malatesta laughing; and swearing in his Perugian fashion, he added: "By Heaven, in matters of cunning policy I am not fit to be your fool!"

Baccio, more and more satisfied with his plan, went on to say:

"There is another recommendation in my plan. —By this means, the most violent of the Piagnoni will be found out, those of whom we can expect neither truce nor peace, and who therefore must be exterminated; and the more there are despatched to the other world in this quarrel, the less work there will be for the executioner, the less hatred will accrue to us, to the pope, and to the house of the Medici—for even of hatred one must be thrifty.—And of Niccolo, above all others, I should be glad to rid myself with a good musket-shot, without having to send him to the dungeon, for he is vastly popular; and in a new state like ours, and one that requires every kind of support, it is a bad thing to come into collision with such fellows as Niccolo. All depends on his being able, old as he is, to be present at this skirmish—of his will to be there, I have no doubt."

"Why, as to his being inclined, he'll be only too much so; but whether he will be able, is another question," said Troilus; "this evening he was considerably done up.—At all events, it might happen that——"

"Oh! if he's likely to drop off in that way, so much the better for him; otherwise, we must dismiss every other consideration let the people say what they may. He's not the sort of man we can leave alive in Florence, if we wish the house of the Medici to take root! But we'll think of that by-and-by. There is another point too, if these fellows fall out among themselves, how will you effect your escape, Troilus? I would not that you should be left amongst them, now that we are in sight of port."

Not that Baccio really cared much about the young man's life; nay, when his object was attained, if it happened the other way, he would probably have gladly included him too in the calculation he had made about the pay of the soldiers; but at present he might still be necessary to him, in case Niccolo remained alive, and it became expedient to find means of getting him into his power, without exciting offence or observation among the people.

"You know that of my life, I have not been particularly sparing hitherto," replied Troilus. Then, with an artful smile he added: "But to tell you the truth, as matters now stand, I too was thinking, that my life is worth a few more ducats, than it was a month ago—and if this comedy can be enacted to the life, without my breaking my neck, I shall be equally glad, I assure you."

"Leave the care of that to me," said Baccio, sharply. And extending his hand to him, he continued: "Well, now go, and play the Piagnone in the same way as the rest, and don't fear; for I'll find means to extricate you out of any and every danger—you can trust me, can you not?"

Trust, or no trust, said Troilus to himself, out of this flagon I must drink;—then speaking aloud:

"Come, Sir Baccio, you see I don't stand to haggle about risks and hair-breadth 'scapes, and this I hope you'll remember at the proper time; now let me be off, and let us hope for the best."

"Yes, get you gone, and make yourself easy, for of stratagems I have an abundance, and I shall be able to extricate you—but" (and he raised his finger to give greater force to his parting words) "discretion and prudence—and remember, this will be the last of your labours; and after that, you will have nothing to do, but to be merry and enjoy yourself."

Troilus quitted the room, muttering between his teeth: "The last of my labours! I should be sorry if it were really the last though!" However, as he could not help himself (for there was no trifling with Baccio, who now might be called the master of Florence; as he had been in the habit of doing with Baccio, when only commissary of the camp, and when everything was still dubious, and full of dangers) he resigned himself to the punctual performance, at all hazards, of what he had been charged with.

Niccolo, meanwhile, with great difficulty, and not without some danger, —for it was no light matter to make his way through the streets, at a time of such confusion,—had betaken himself to the gate of St. Mark's. He knocked in a particular manner, which he always adopted, and by which it was known to be him; the porter came, and, first inquiring whether he was alone, and being answered in the affirmative, opened the gate about half way, not without symptoms of alarm; and having admitted him, he hastily shut it with every bolt and bar that was attached to it. He was an old laic, who had held his post ever since the time of Father Jerome; a man of great simplicity, and a very attached servant of the convent and of the Piagnone party.

"Excuse me, Sir Niccolo," he said, "for asking you whether you were alone; but I still retain a recollection of the riots of '98, and it seems to me, that those times bid fair to return.—Alas! the scourges predicted by our saintly master are not yet at an end! God have mercy on us."

"Fear not, brother Gaudentius, God only abandons those who decline from Him," said Niccolo, as he passed on; and the aged friar, clasping his hands, replied:—"*Amen*,"—and as he followed him with his eye, he marked the tottering and uneasy gait of Niccolo, as he proceeded along the cloisters of the first court. "Poor old man!" the friar at last exclaimed; and with a sigh and a shake of the head, he re-entered his cell, adjoining the gate.

The feebleness of Niccolo, natural enough to one of his advanced age, and worn out as he had been by the distresses and sufferings, that had lately agitated his frame, was aggravated that night by the state of the atmosphere. Over the Val d'

Arno, and over Florence, the clouds hung thick and low, and forming a stratum, or rather a covering, rendered the air close and heavy; so that not the least breath, not the gentlest current, was perceptible to vivify and stimulate the respiration, in that lurid an oppressive atmosphere. The cloister lamps, placed at considerable intervals, served rather as guides in the darkness, than as a means to give light; shooting up their flames, erect and steady, they just cast a feeble glimmer on the opposite wall or on the pavement below, leaving all the rest in utter gloom. But darkest of all appeared the spaces between the arches, through which at other times the sky would be visible; save that in the northern corner, above the roof, there appeared, every now and then, a tremulous light of a livid, whitish hue, which sweeping over the façades of the cloister, reflected on them for a moment a pale and quivering glimmer, by which you could distinguish the small windows of the different cells, the lines of the architecture, and the well that stood in the middle of the court-yard; and then again, in another second, all relapsed into a deeper gloom than at first. All this time it seemed as if they heard (but so feeble and distant, that it was impossible to say from what quarter it came) a deep and continual rumbling of thunder, similar to the sound produced by a heavy body, when dragged along beneath the vault of a subterranean cavern.

Niccolo having slowly, and with some difficulty, ascended the stair-case, found himself in the passage leading to the dormitory, when he stopped a moment to rest, opposite the picture of the Virgin, that was painted in fresco on the wall before him by Fra Angelico.

The light of a small lamp, that was burning before it, enabled him to distinguish the calm celestial beauty of the face of the Virgin, the devout and graceful conception of a heart uncontaminated, and full of divine love; the majestic and reverent form of the Archangel with his vast wings, outspread and fluttering, his streaming hair, his rich robe extending even to his feet, which supposes rather than displays the outline of his person; and the light and elegant columns, and the arches of the portico, beneath which the two figures are represented. Before this image Niccolo knelt down, and clasping his hands together, stopped to pray for some minutes, imploring the aid of heaven for the undertaking, in which he was about to engage; and he made a vow that if it should be attended with success, he would erect a church, entirely at his own cost, in honour of the Virgin. Presently, upon raising his eyes aloft, there met his gaze at the top of the arch, on which the circular roof of the dormitory rests, the loathed ensign of the Medici, placed there by Cosimo the elder, the founder of the convent. That device appeared to him like a fatal apparition, the sad signal, as it were, of the doom that pursued him. He turned away from it with a gloomy brow, and quitting the spot, followed the right-hand; and after passing a few cells, came to that which belonged to Father Zaccaria.

The two friends embraced each other, without uttering a word; and the friar felt pretty sure, that Niccolo's visit, at that late hour, was not without some grave reason.

"Is it possible," he said looking at him fixedly, and still keeping his hand on his shoulder, where he had placed it on saluting him, "is it possible, that any hope can still remain to us?"

"In men but little, father, but in God much. —I am come here to-night, because I cannot believe that He has entirely abandoned us, that He has in his anger given us up to utter ruin.— I cannot persuade myself that our sainted martyr has forsaken this miserable people—and that he does not aid and defend them, now he is in heaven, against their tyrants, as he did whilst alive, —and on earth. Oh yes! I believe it most certainly; this is a trial, a terrible trial, that God permits to test our faith:—let us prove ourselves conquerors in the trial—let us not suffer our faith to be overthrown and dismayed—let us not be scandalised at the sight of the abomination; and, as true as God's alive, He will not fail his faithful servants—He will not give them over into the hands of their enemies; but after our tribulation, after our trial, there will ensue joy and victory.—"

After he had given utterance to these words, to which the feelings and aspirations of the zealous friar fully responded,—for he was no less enthusiastic than Niccolo, and from being in the vigour of his age, he surpassed him in energy,—the old man unfolded his project. He told him, he had sent his young men to try and revive the fallen hopes of the Piagnoni; that they were to muster, and come all of them that night to the convent, to deliberate on the best measures they could adopt in their pretent extremity; and dilating fluently on the subject, he without much difficulty soon infused into the friar the zeal and sanguine confidence he felt himself; and they determined to go at once to the superior, Father Benedict, and acquaint him with their designs.

They found the poor old man already in bed; and whether he was alarmed at the hazardous project of Niccolo, it is scarcely necessary to say, as it can be pretty well imagined by those, who are acquainted with his mild and timid disposition. Without moral courage, he usually resigned himself to the guidance of others; and this course he followed in the present difficult and dangerous circumstances, the rather, from feeling that he had neither remedies nor counsels to offer; much less, boldness to face the dangers that threatened them. His words abounded in sighs, in lamentations and remonstrances; but the result was, to resign himself entirely to Niccolo's guidance, imploring God to protect the city and the convent, from the ruin and devastation that threatened them.

Having then quitted Father Benedict, Niccolo descended to the church to wait, and Father Zaccaria went from cell to cell, to wake the friars, and inform them of what they were going to do; beginning with those on whom he could most securely reckon; and so, by degrees, the whole convent was awoke. The friars, upon coming out of their cells, were seen in the passages talking together over this new project, and then, either making their way in parties of two and three towards the church; or forming themselves into knots, were still discussing it; some sad and thoughtful, others fiery and loquacious; all of them dressed in their white tunics, and many with candles or torches in their hands, which, shedding their light upward, displayed to view countenances, that were for the most part stern and possessing a manly expression, but which, owing to the sharp outlines, formed by the light and shade, appeared more than usually angular, wrinkled, and hollow.

In a word, the whole of the inmates of the convent, who amounted perhaps to about two hundred, assembled in the church; in the greater number, who had on many occasions taken an important part in the deliberations of the State, and who were accustomed to dangers, to civic contests and revolutions, it excited no surprise and caused no alarm, to be summoned to this nocturnal and secret consistory; for in that age, men belonging to those classes, that are ordinarily less enterprising, had a certain degree of heroic and knightly feeling, which the progress of civilization has eradicated from modern society.

Meantime, from a clock that stood at the farthermost end of the dormitory, in a tall narrow case of dark walnut-wood, which concealed the movements of the pendulum, the hour of midnight was heard to strike; presently the clock of the sacristy chimed forth, and then that in the belfry-tower; it was the hour appointed; and soon, some might be expected to arrive.—A friar was directed to wait at the garden-door, that leads into the street del Maglio, with injunctions to open, to whoever gave the pass-word that had been agreed upon:—*St. Mark and liberty.*

CHAPTER III.

Niccolo, on entering the church, knelt down before the high altar. A sacristan was lighting four wax tapers, which served in some measure to dispel the darkness; for so vast an edifice could not be said to be lit up by their few feeble rays. But the flashes of lightning that momentarily darted through the building illuminated it entirely, and from end to end; and which, as they glanced on the windows, became tinged with the bright and varied hues of the stained glass, and ran through the church with a splendour resembling the rainbow; and, after continuing for a few seconds their tremulous and dazzling brilliancy, disappeared with equal rapidity, and in the darkness that succeeded, made the light of the tapers seem more pale and feeble than ever. The flames, shooting up erect, and burning steadily till now, began all at once to flicker fitfully, and became attenuated, as if on the point of going out; for the storm having gathered in the mountains of Mugello,was drifting onward. Already that moist, fresh wind was rising, which usually precedes a tempest, and which, entering through the cracks and fissures of the windows with shrill and discordant whistlings, or whirling about beneath the porches of the cloister, among the passages and recesses of the convent-buildings, caused, by its rapid and opposing currents, the doors to bang, the bars and shutters to rattle, and the curtains and hangings to flutter, as if giving warning to prepare for the approaching storm. The thunder, too, now becoming nearer and louder, seemed to be traversing the upper regions of the sky; muttering in the distance, it rolled onward, and then burst overhead with the crash and roar of artillery; till at last, gradually receding, it reverberated with a distant and prolonged murmur in the narrow gorges of the neighbouring mountains. The first heavy drops of rain began to beat, in a slanting direction, on the panes of glass; by little and little they fell faster and more furiously, until to this uproar was added the more distinct and rattling sound of the beating hail, as it rebounded on the roof, on the tiles, and against the walls and windows; and at every clap of thunder, the driving rain and the howling of the wind became more and more terrific; whilst, in the neighbouring garden, could be heard the trees crashing and creaking from the violence of the blast.

Of all this uproar, Niccolo was scarcely conscious; for absorbed in his own reflections, he had no mind for anything else, except to commend his cause to God, and to beg that He would bless it with success. But owing to the change in the state of the air, and the freshness imparted by the storm, feeling his spirits revived, and the heavy languor which oppressed him, give way to renewed energy and, one may almost say, to new life, he rose up, with a heart more than ever disposed to hope for the best.

The church, in the meantime, was filling with the friars. Father Zaccaria, approaching Niccolo, said to him: " This tempest is in our favour; our friends will be able to come from their homes to join us here with the greater security, and without anybody seeing them——"

At that moment Lambert presented himself at the sacristy door, wet through, and dripping all over, just as if he had been drawn out of a river. Niccolo looked at him intently as he approached, in order to read in his countenance the result of his negotiations, but he perceived at once that he had very little good news to tell. When Lambert had approached him, he said, with a gloomy face:

" I have done all I could.—One or two I have found—of the common people, though—of your workmen of the suburb of Santa Maria.—These are all ready and willing! I have been from house to house, and not one showed any reluctance, not even the women—nay, they were foremost in encouraging the men, and said, ' Go, go; for Sir Niccolo knows best what should be done; and besides, don't we live by his bread?—and so it's our duty to venture our lives for him, and to do what he wishes.'—And in this way did these poor people stimulate one another, and began to get themselves ready; and you will soon see them here in tolerable numbers. But the wealthier people, the respectable class" (this he said, shaking his head and sighing)—" as for these, it's quite another matter. Some are fled and gone—some lie concealed—others I could not find—and the few I did, it seemed to them as if I spoke of some wild project—as if I talked the greatest nonsense in the world. ' Oh, what's the use of trying to do anything now? It's like beating the air,' said some. Many again denounced Father Jerome, and said, ' Our eyes are opened at last!' and curse the day when they put any faith in him.—Maybe, I've been rather unfortunate—perhaps my brothers and Troilus will have had better luck. It can't be long before they're here: let us hope they will bring better news."

When Lambert had said this, he withdrew to one side, whilst Niccolo exclaimed:

" And then, by-and-by, they'll be saying that God has forsaken them!—that he refuses to aid them!—whereas it is they, on the contrary, who abandon and abjure his prophet.—Oh, poor people! Poor Florence!"

And with folded arms, he remained for a moment silent and abstracted; but in a minute or two, he added: " Well, let us wait for the rest."

The friars who had crowded round Lambert to hear what tidings he had brought, presently dispersed again, and by their countenances, and some half-muttered words, showed that they felt more dejected than surprised; while some forming themselves into knots of four or five, some sitting down on the benches, and others pacing up and down, at the further end of the church, they were passing the time in conversation, according to their various fancies and inclinations. One party seeing in the surrender of the city, only the ruin of the popular constitution, talked of liberty, and deplored its impending extinction; another, well aware that the convent would be deprived of the authority they had exercised in political matters under the Republic, were expressing their regrets, by saying: "The Minor Friars will have beaten us a second time!" And the lay bell-ringer added, almost with tears: "And our poor bell too, will it have to make the journey back again to San Francesco?"* Many, who were more distressed on religious grounds, and for the sanctity of their rule, that had been upheld by the exhortations and example of Savonarola, observed with feelings of real sorrow: "And if the Medici return, who will then be able to restrain this people? We shall be as bad as we were before, and even worse, with their gambling, and lewdness, and taverns.—And to think that the Medici founded this convent!—Oh!—God deliver us from such founders of churches, for even their pious deeds they pervert to the purpose of deceiving the people." And there were even some, who had never, in their hearts, attached much faith to Father Jerome; although, for peace and quietness' sake, they had not openly expressed their sentiments; and amongst these, sly winks and stealthy smiles were exchanged, whilst they whispered to one another, in an under tone, the famous words of the friar: "Do you see now?" *

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* Between the Minor Friars and those of St. Mark's, there existed a sort of rivalry, amounting almost to animosity, ever since the times of Father Jerome, to whose ruin the former contributed not a little. After his death, they obtained permission from the Seigniory to take away their bell from the Dominicans, and they conveyed it to their Franciscan convent, outside of the gate of San Miniato; from whence, however, it was afterwards restored to its former place.

The fury of the storm continued all this time unabated: and it seemed more like a scene from the other world, to see at that hour, beneath the ancient roof of St. Mark's, such an assemblage of white figures, moving to and fro in that dim and solemn light, which streamed sluggishly forth from four dull tapers at the high altar, more resembling stars, setting in a misty sky. Add to this the brief and rapid gleams of the lightning, the rattling of the hail and rain, the frequent claps of thunder, which seemed to make the very walls tremble; the raging and howling of the

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* In the year 1496, the Emperor Maximilian came to Leghorn, with the troops of the Duke of Milan, and the Venetian armada, with a view to change the political state of Florence. The Florentines looked upon themselves as lost men, and the enemies of Savonarola went about saying among themselves: "Do you see now, that this friar has deceived us!" The overthrow of the Emperor following, as Savonarola had predicted, the latter preached a sermon, in which he repeated every now and then his adversaries' words, turning them to his own account; from which circumstance, it was afterwards called the sermon of *Do you see now?*

wind, as it rushed through the narrow passages, through the clefts and crannies, producing at one time a shrill whistling sound, whilst at another, as if imitating the human voice, it seemed to wail, or to utter a prolonged sigh; and presently, you might fancy it to be the distant roaring of wild beasts. Some of the friars, who were less courageous or more credulous than the rest, had an idea that evil spirits were mixed up in this storm, and they could not help thinking, that those mysterious and ominous sounds must proceed from infernal throats, from some company of demons not far off, who were marshalling their ranks, to come and make a vigorous assault on the convent; and one old lay brother, crossing himself, and fetching a deep breath, said: "To-night too, unless I'm mistaken, the nuns of St. Lucia are like to have a bit of a holyday, as they had, when the blessed Father Jerome was led away a prisoner to the palace!" *

Some youthful novices felt their nerves shake at these words, which were uttered very seriously, and with a countenance betokening grave alarm; and with their eyes and mouths wide open, they seemed to ask and expect from the old man a more particular account of the transaction. The laic with a solemn face proceeded with the story: "Why, whoever has grown old in this convent has

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* "The night on which St. Mark's Convent was stormed" (so relates Pacifico Burlamacchi), "the nuns of Santa Lucia were not assailed by any evil spirits; which latter said the next morning by their mouth, *This last night we have been busy in the host, that has been attacking the friars of St. Mark's.*"

had some strange experiences, I warrant you! There have been times, when the enemy left us at peace neither day nor night; and just so did he with those poor nuns of St. Lucia. But at that time Father Jerome was alive—and there was that holy man too, Father Dominic da Pescia.—You ought to have seen how he encountered the devil! Ah, there was no playing the fool with him! True it is, that once upon a time the devil played him such a trick, that any other man would have left off meddling with exorcisms.—Listen to this!—it put us all into a terrible fright, I can tell you;—I can't describe what it was like!—You know the cell which is now brother Giordano's—there, you know, is the picture of our Lord, tempted by that very black Satan, with his great tail and horns! Well;—one day, Dominic (whatever could have possessed him, I don't know) took a broom in his hand, and began making all sorts of wry faces and gestures before it.—Well, we had just returned from the midnight office, and were laid down to sleep again—"

(The novices shrugged their shoulders, and looked round with affright, expecting every moment to see some little sprite or other scampering through the church.)

"—It might be about two hours after midnight; when all at once we heard a loud knocking, and a stifled cry:—what could it be?—It was the evil spirit, who, in order to avenge himself, had inflicted on father Dominic such a beating, that he was left in a worse plight, than I can describe to you. And I, ever since this affair—I have no mind to play the hero!—I, when I go to sweep the cell, and see that old Lucifer, commend myself to God, and say in my heart:—

" 'Leave me alone, and let me be,
Nor good, nor ill, I'll do to thee.'

Just fancy, if he served father Dominic so, who was in holy orders, with me, poor sinner that I am!—he would strangle me at once! so God and the holy Virgin help me.—Now indeed, we have nothing to complain of; they have become more quiet—but then!—why, some nights, there was no finding our way down to choir! Sometimes you would see several huge black cats on the beams of the roof, with eyes like hot coals; lizards too would crawl along the walls, like sunbeams; and you could not see whence they came, nor whither they went; and sometimes you would see one of them, standing over the flame of the lamp, and enjoying the heat—why, to be sure, in comparison with the fire of the infernal regions, it must have seemed to it frost and snow! By-and-by, on turning a corner in the dormitory, lo and behold, at the furthermost end, standing against the wall, black as an Ethiopian, there would be a little dwarfish imp, all eyes and mouth!—Ugh, Sirs! mercy upon us—these eyes of mine have seen strange sights!"

"And did the same sort of things happen to the nuns?" asked a novice, in a subdued whisper, and trembling all over.

" The same, and worse! The devil assailed first one and then another, and drove them to distraction, they scarce knew what they did;—but they couldn't help themselves—it was all the enemy.—And then they sent in haste for father Dominic.—And his was just as good as a saint's hand; no sooner did he hold it up, than they were free; and when, owing to any hindrance, he could not go himself, he sent some one else with a Bible, and a command to the devil to be gone.—Oh! you should then have heard, how he cried out.—Oh! just to see him, when confronted with the holy book!—And when he was going to pronounce the name of our holy prophet, instead of father Jerome, he would say in mockery, father Jeromini, father Jiraffa, and such like impertinences.—Well, thank God, we are delivered from this tribulation!"—

Among others, who heard all this, was an old friar, a thin spare man, reduced, by his long fastings and penances, to the appearance of one of those natural mummies, that are to be seen, for instance, in the convent of the Capuchins at Rome; which, clothed in a friar's habit, show only the face, covered with a dry, parched, and wrinkled skin. This man who, during his whole life, had never had a quiet hour, being ever tormented with qualms and scruples, said with a shrill and tremulous voice: " The reason why the devil no longer torments us, as at other times, and no longer appears to us, I will tell you, my brothers," (and here he uttered a deep sigh). " It is, that matters go on too much as he would have them, in this convent; whereas, in father Jerome's time, it was just the contrary" (here another sigh). "We have become more profuse in our living, in our dress, and in everything—and instead of attending to the spirit, instead of *insanire pro Christo,* we have turned to the pride of mundane vanities.—Complin is said now after supper, contrary to father Jerome's rules—the Bible, which the friars then had always under their arm, is now laid aside and neglected.—In a word, very little attention is paid to the interior, my brethren.—Why then should the devil trouble himself with us, when we so straightly walk in the way he would have us?"—And here he uttered another long-drawn sigh, quite equal to three orfour ordinary ones.

At this moment, all eyes were turned to the spot where Niccolo was standing, attracted by a slight commotion in that direction, which was caused by the entrance of his sons, with Troilus and Fanfulla; around whom the friars, who were dispersed about the church, soon collected. The news which they brought was not a whit better than Lambert's; and the truth seemed to be forcing itself more and more on their convictions, that they must make up their minds to yield to their fate. Averardo began to speak in his usual gruff and surly manner; and after recounting what he had done, which amounted in substance to much the same that Lambert had been able to effect; and railing in severe terms against those citizens, who refused to expose themselves to fresh dangers, he exclaimed, fiercely looking up, as a vivid flash of lightning darted through the church, followed immediately by a tremendous clap of thunder: "May yon flame scathe those vile cowards, who would rather live as slaves than die free!"

This imprecation, issuing at such a moment from the lips of a man, who, by his terrible look alone, inspired you with fear, made the hair stand on end even of the boldest of those who stood by.

The old friar, who was notorious for his scruples, placed his hands up to his head, and muttered between his teeth: "*Sanctus Deus, Sanctus fortis, Sanctus immortalis!*" And Niccolo, raising his hand with an attitude of authority towards his son, and looking intently at him, said: "Averardo, remember thou art in a church!" And he, who would not have quailed before an army, could not sustain the glance of Niccolo's eye; but, dropping his eyes, became mute in a moment.

Bindo after this rose up and said, as he came forward with a bold and fearless air: (for what at his age do we despair of, or dread?) "And if I tell you that I have been with the Manelli, the Agolanti, the Spini, and have found those young fellows ready to do what we propose, and have not seen in them that dastardly spirit you speak of? And though, to say truth, the old men, and the fathers of many reproved them, and were utterly opposed to our design, yet the sons have assured me, that they would try and get out by stealth, and meet us here to-night. I, for my part, do not despair;—no, for of such brave young fellows there is no lack in Florence, thank God; all depends on making a beginning; and then you need not fear, but that all will rise up and join us." But Bindo could not inspire those who heard him, with the confidence he felt himself. Looking round on the countenances of all present, you might see alarm depicted on them, and a restless and painful uncertainty; and Niccolo himself, although he certainly did his utmost to appear confident and serene, yet even he displayed in his face the fears that agitated him within.

He turned his eyes on Fanfulla, who was standing as erect as possible, with his usual impassive expression of countenance, neither joyful nor sad, and wearing over his coat of mail the scapulary of St. Dominic, had the appearance both of friar and of soldier; he looked at him, as if to invite him to express his opinion; and Father Zaccaria, at the same time, divining Niccolo's thoughts, said: "Come, brother George, you know more than we do about such matters; do you think there is any way,——that anything can yet be done?"

All eyes were earnestly bent on Fanfulla, who, arching his brows, letting fall his eyes, and projecting his lower lip, shook his head, and, drawing his breath deeply, muttered a *hum!* between his teeth, which was anything but a good omen. At last, clapping his hand to his forehead, he said:

"As I am not a Florentine, I am not so well acquainted with the disposition of the inhabitants as you are. So, when I went out this evening, I said:—Go now a bit amongst those who know you, and talk to the soldiers, and learn what their ideas are. And why so?—because, you know, they are the very soul of these matters.—I say not this to disparage the citizen soldiers, as I never saw better or braver—but the fact is, and it is necessary that I should tell you so, every man to his trade; and a score of lances, who have grown old at that kind of work, and who, from their cradle one may say, have been inured to discipline, and always to have one eye to the cat, and another to the frying-pan; that is, I mean to say, one eye to the enemy, and the other to the flag; and mind, not to break the line; and who, in the midst of shots—a wink of the serjeant or captain—and they understand it; and even without it, know of themselves what to do,—in a word, you understand me—a score of such fellows as these is worth more than a hundred other men, be they as brave as you please, if they don't know their work, and at one time do too much, at another too little, and at another nothing at all; and can't understand, that a battalion of soldiers must be like a saw, in which the teeth are many, but all moved by a single will; and then something's done.—Well then, I went round the barracks of the regular troops—I know them all of old! I have placed the first sword in the hands of many a one of them

—I went first of all to those who are posted at Santa Croce; I walked in;—it's Fanfulla here, Fanfulla there—How are you, good day, all in a moment.—I say to myself—Try them, on this bout —and I begin by assailing them with all manner of abuse: 'Fine work truly, by Jesus and our Lady!————'"

But scarcely had he uttered these words, when he clapped his hand to his mouth, aware that he was describing the scene rather too much to the life; and soon resuming, he went on to say: "A brave name you will gain truly!—To surrender the city—when there is not a hand's breadth of the bastion that's been grazed yet—you don't lack powder or ball—you have not yet had to eat your shoe-leather!—Had I known that the fighting was to be mere child's play, I had never stirred a foot out of St. Mark's Convent (I merely said this, without meaning it; for, poor fellows, they have not behaved badly; but with soldiers, one must speak in this fashion). And they said, some one thing, and some another, and appeared downcast, and as if they too were ashamed of the turn matters have taken:—It's all been the Seignors.—It's that traitor Malatesta.—And one shrugged his shoulders, one cursed, another said:—Here we are still; who pays us and leads us on! And a Gascon Captain, a brave man, we were together at the taking of Brescia—I, says he, the other day, if the Seignors would have allowed me, was ready to attack Malatesta's soldiers with my troop; but they wouldn't have it! And am I to be for doing more than my masters? It's too late now—"

Fanfulla ceased speaking for a moment; then, shrugging his shoulders and putting up his arms, he added: "He's right! what could you say to him?—in war, opportunity is everything. If you let it escape, so much the worse for you."

Whilst Fanfulla was speaking, several silk and woollen weavers had poured in, one by one, and operatives of the lower class, all more or less armed according as circumstances permitted; some of those young men too came with them, to whom Bindo had spoken; but altogether they did not amount to two hundred. An hour passed; the sacristy clock had already struck two some time, and no more made their appearance; whilst those who had answered the summons, seeing their small number, and noting the dejection that was depicted on the countenances of the friars, and even on that of Niccolo himself, began to look at one another; and not a few, in their hearts, sincerely repented having left home.

Niccolo was in a state of great perplexity, and agitated by a current of opposing thoughts. To send them home again, and so renounce his last hope, was to him a hard and bitter thing to do; and to urge on such a handful of men, to such a forlorn hope, nay, to a certain death, he could not bring himself to think of it. Whilst he was in this state of distraction, the friars had arranged, along both sides of the church, several benches, reaching to the high altar, on which they and the most important persons at the meeting sat down; the rest of the people standing at the further end of the church, completed the quadrangle on that side, the space between remaining vacant. Niccolo sat upon a chair, which had been placed at the upper end, having Father Zaccaria and the young men of his family by his side; and they were talking in an under tone, when there stept forth into the midst, coming from the sacristy door, an old man, who seemed by his clothes a poor workman; he had on over his ordinary dress a rusty iron breastplate, and a sword at his side. His appearance was that of a man, whom age and sufferings had brought to the close of life; but such life as he still retained, seemed all concentrated in the wild fury of his eye, which evidently bespoke a fierce and desperate will.

This old man held by the hand a child of some twelve years old, thin and pallid. It appeared more astonished than alarmed, at finding itself in such a place, and in the midst of this strange assemblage.

Niccolo knew this man, as having been very enthusiastic for the doctrines of Father Jerome; he had taken part in the defence of the convent in '98, and had ever since, at all times and under every government, constantly persevered in maintaining the same opinions; doing his utmost to keep them alive among the people, as far as his humble lot and limited influence would allow him.

"Ah! Master Simon!" said Niccolo, as he advanced towards him with this lad; "ah! what brings you here with your grandson, Bertrand?"

"His Father Peter, my noble son," replied the aged man, "has fallen fighting for our liberty.—This child and I are the only ones who are left at home—we are alone in the world.—You know, we have no more now; and since I am indifferent about living any longer, I have brought with me this poor orphan, that he may either live or die with the last defenders of his country."

Niccolo, raising his eyes and hands to heaven, exclaimed: "Oh, why have not all our countrymen hearts like this poor man's! Oh, why have the rich men of this city, who were bound to give an example to the rest, withdrawn their shoulder from the burden, when it was most incumbent on them honourably to bear it?"

And as he gradually warmed in his harangue, his voice still rising higher, he continued:

"These are not the examples, that our ancestors bequeathed to us, who dared to look popes, and kings, and emperors in the face, and to defend the liberty of Florence against all who assailed it! O Florence! at the foot of thy walls, fell the pride of the emperor, Henry of Luxemburg, and of all the power of the Holy Roman Empire!—The Emperor Maximilian—and this we have seen in our day, with our own eyes—was compelled to fly, before he had even seen thy towers!—To Charles of France, when he was within thy gates, with the flower of his chivalry, thou showedst so bold a front, when he wished to enslave thee, that he was but too glad to save himself and his troops, and thou remainedst honoured and independent.—But, gracious heaven! is the present danger greater than these were? Are we men of a different mould from those of that day? Is liberty, is honour, is religion, no longer a blessing? Is slavery, is infamy, no longer a curse? Is it possible, great God, that we are fallen into the mire of such abject cowardice? Is it possible, that our sins have been so grievous, that thou hast thus forsaken us? That thy people could be so accursed by thee? O my countrymen! My sons! shall we ever have to utter the terrible words! shall we ever have to say to the Florentines, and not rather die a thousand deaths first:—*Florence is no more! Florence is a slave!*—and we remain alive! and return to our homes, to our wives and children, for whom we ought to have maintained, in its integrity, the liberty left us by our forefathers! And what shall we say to them, as we unbuckle our dastard swords, unstained with blood, and throw them aside into a corner? what shall we say to them? what words shall we devise to soothe them, and to reconcile them to be no longer freemen, but a herd of cattle, the property of the Medici? And if these tyrants shall put forth their hand, to take the lives and property of your sons, when grown to manhood, will they not have reason to curse you, and to cry shame upon you, as cowards? And what is life after all, that it deserves to be saved at such a price? And think not that I speak thus, because I am an old man, and the stake I venture, is but a few days, a few hours perhaps, of life. For have I not sons? These that stand around me, are they not my own blood? And am I sparing of it?" (and placing his hand on Bindo's head, who was close to him) "am I sparing of the blood of this stripling, for whom there might be in store many years of a happy life? And in making a present of him to my country, who shall say that I give not much more than my own life?—Oh, my countrymen, have pity on this poor unhappy land;—perhaps it is yet time! O Saviour, our King, have pity on Florence, which is thy kingdom too! *Parce, Domine!* pardon our sins, forgive them yet this once—let thy vengeance spare my country—I, for the sins of all—I offer thee these miserable grey hairs, I offer thee these my children!—Blot out my name—let my race be exterminated, and my memory perish from off the face of the earth—but Florence! oh, let Florence be safe, be happy, and be free!"

Shedding tears before them all, but with lofty brow, showing he was not ashamed of those tears, Niccolo closed his harangue, which had perhaps been rather the necessary vent of the irrepressible feelings, that had taken possession of him, than considered as a means, by which he hoped to promote the cause he had at heart. Sorrowful and dejected looks, together with a silence as profound as that of death, gave to the old man's words a too distinct and eloquent reply.

The storm, driving before the wind, had in the meantime passed over, in the direction of Volterra; from time to time a chance flash of lightning still gleamed before their eyes, and the distant roar of thunder fell upon the ear.

Niccolo experienced a feeling of pain and distress far more terrible, than that which weighed him down, when the surrender of the city was decided on; he had now lost his last hope, it was only just now, that Florence was irretrievably lost to him; it was only now, that he felt he had indeed become the slave of the Medici.

With his elbows supported on his knees, and his forehead resting on his hands, he continued in this attitude without stirring; annihilated, so to say, by the very immensity of his misfortune; and he would at that moment have blessed God, if he had sent death to his relief. Unhappy old man! there remains still more for thee to suffer yet!—

The poor people and the workmen, who, to the glowing eloquence of Niccolo, had replied only by their silence; judging (with that tact and nice perception which is almost always found in rude, uncultivated persons) that it was now misplaced to show any disposition to continue the struggle, could not endure the sight of the distress and tears of the man, whom they had been accustomed to consider as their common father, and as a being of a higher nature and superior intelligence. They were terror-stricken, one might say, to see him like other men, the victim of human misery and misfortune; and on account of the love they bore him, they felt their heart wrung, and upbraided themselves, as if they were the cause of every sorrow, and every trouble that had befallen him. And there began to arise a low whispering among these poor men; whilst Niccolo still continued motionless, with his forehead resting on his hands. And some gave vent to their feelings in sighs, which seemed more like moans; some thrust their hands into their hair, some displayed every attitude of grief, and others with the back of their rough hands wiped away a tear; and all, in these, or similar ways, exhibited the strength of their feelings and the sincerity of their sorrow; for being restrained by the presence of so many of their superiors, they did not attempt to come forward; but were even careful not to stir, or to speak out loud.

But as their feelings rose to a higher pitch, they began to speak to one another in an under tone:

"Oh! we are a parcel of wicked wretches! —Poor old man! to think he should have to weep so! — He who has known us from our cradles!—For whom we have worked all our lives! —And in the time of the famine, too, who was it found us bread?—And now, when he's in such trouble, do we hold back?—And we shall not like, by-and-by, for the great folks to say, that the poor are ungrateful!—Thou, what sayest thou, Sandro?—And thou, Bozza?—Shall we rush forward and cast ourselves at his feet, and ask his pardon? tell him we are ready, and that he may do with us as he pleases? Wilt thou go, man?—Shall I go?—Shall we all go?"—

"Let us go,"—some exclaimed eagerly; and rushing forward, with the rest behind, they advanced into the empty space, around which the seats were ranged, and hastily stepping up to Niccolo, who had slightly raised his head at the noise, occasioned by their approach, they fell on their knees at his feet, and those who were in the front row, catching hold of his clothes, or placing their hands on his knees, with humble and imploring looks, and eyes filled with tears, began to speak confusedly and all together, so that he was at a loss to understand what they were about, or what they wanted; except that from their speaking looks, the uplifted arms of those who were in the background, and from a word or two that he caught now and then more distinctly, as, pardon—sorry—we are your children—while life lasts—and other similar expressions, Niccolo soon learnt what the feelings and dispositions of these poor people were. His heart was touched by it, and so were the hearts of all present. He raised his hands, and at one moment placing them, in a benevolent manner, upon the heads of those nearest him, who seized them with affectionate ardour, and covered them with caresses, at another beckoning to them to be silent and to rise up; after some time, he succeeded in pacifying their noisy and confused loquaciousness, but not in inducing them to rise.

"Why, my children, what is it you want? Speak, one of you, and tell me what it is you desire."

"Bozza! let Bozza speak!" exclaimed several voices; and a man somewhat above forty, tall, muscular and of a bold intrepid cast of countenance, though at that moment, it was moist with tears, extending his naked and sinewy arms, said: "Sir Niccolo, we are ignorant wretches —you must pity us—we are cowards,—we know it! We deserve to be driven from your presence with kicks and blows.—Do we not know that every blessing we enjoy in life, we owe to you? that these clothes upon our backs, are yours? that you have succoured us, when we were sick and ill, and taken care of us, when there was no work? And during this siege, what had become of us, and of our families, had it not have been for you? we had died of starvation. And just now, when you spoke those words for the good of the city, for our good—we—vile wretches—did not stir—did not answer a word —we are beasts I say—and then we have seen you shed tears—and we cannot bear to see you do that—and you must not grieve—for we are here —and you may use us in whatever service you think proper—and while we have life—whilst even a little bit of us remains—why you know, Sir Niccolo, we are all heartily at your service. But come—Sir—dry up those dear old eyes—pray let us see you with a more cheerful face,—and then we shall feel that you have forgiven us, that you are not angry with us.—Oh! Sir Niccolo, pardon us, pray do forgive us!—"

Hereupon they all stretched out their arms towards him, exclaiming: "Pardon, pardon!—"

CHAPTER IV.

"PARDON?" said Niccolo, his countenance beaming with a tender and melancholy pity; and for what am I to pardon you, my poor children?—Ah! no—the fault is not yours, but your rulers'; those who ought to have defended you, but have abandoned you.——You did not answer, when I spoke! Why, what could you have answered? Ah! I see, I too know, that there is no longer any remedy—we are given over by God. If I spoke as I did, it was, because I could not see the hopes and struggles of a whole life scattered to the winds; I could not see my country trampled down, and fallen under the power of our enemies, and into the hands of traitors, and remain silent, and with dry eyes.—But, my children, I know, I know it very well, what could you now do to stave off our doom? Who can resist, who can evade the judgment of Heaven? And this judgment is now clear and manifest. He sent his prophet to us, as he did to the Ninevites; they repented and were saved; we have hardened ourselves in our sin, we have slain his prophet; and therefore we could not prosper: 'tis a righteous retribution! *Justus es, Domine; et rectum judicium tuum.* And then, they say, he deceived us! We, wretched creatures, have deceived ourselves! for he promised us mercy, but on condition of our turning to God, and forsaking our shameful viciousness of life. Have we done so?—Rise up, then, my children, and return to your homes; go, and Heaven bless you a thousand times. This will perhaps be the last time, that we shall see each other;—if I have, at any time, wronged you, if I have, in aught, offended you, I pray you to pardon me. Ever remember Niccolo, who loved you as his children till death; —and remember, if ever happier days should dawn on Florence, that it is always possible our country may rise again; and be ever ready to render her your best services. Remember your Creator, who ought to be the sole object of all we do, and pray to Him for my soul; pray to Him, to make me worthy to quit this life with his heavenly grace, and calmly to meet whatever kind of death he may see fit to send me—even if I should have—and it's likely I shall!—if I should have to lay down my life beneath the axe of the Palleschi."

At these words, all these poor people, who till now had continued kneeling with meek humility, started to their feet, as if a mine had burst under them; and, with fierce and threatening attitudes, raising their clenched fists aloft, grinding and gnashing their teeth, they all swore to die in defence of Niccolo; and Bozza, making his voice heard above the rest, exclaimed:—"No, we are here! and sooner than a hair of you should be touched—they shall make hashed meat of every man of us, and half Florence to boot!"

Niccolo waving his hand, once more reduced this clamorous body to order, and then said:—

"I thank ye, my children, I thank ye, and God knows it is with all my heart!—But if I am not minded, that you should risk your lives for the welfare of the city, you may judge, whether I would have you do so for mine.—God forbid!—Now go, and pray for me, as I shall do for you."

Troilus, who, during all these exciting scenes had never stirred, nor so much as opened his mouth, considered that the moment was now arrived, which was favourable to his design; and stepping forward, he said in a bold and earnest manner:—

"Sir Niccolo and fellow-countrymen! listen to me; a thought has just struck me; there is still a hope remaining to us!——"

All turned at these words, and looked eagerly at him, for no one expected such a thing at that moment, much less from Troilus; and he went on,—

"Yes, one way remains open to us!—doubtful—difficult—it is true—but we are come to that pass, that boldness, even rashness, may become prudence in us. Tell me: Who is it that presses his foot on the neck of Florence? Who holds it vanquished, and in his power, that it can make no further defence? Why, the Imperialist army. To hope to attack and rout it with the forces of a panic-stricken and divided city, is absurd! But, what, if I show you how to work its ruin with its own weapons? And the means to effect this, by Heaven! I trust I have discovered."

Niccolo threw his arms round the traitor's neck, who, receiving this embrace with apparent modesty, continued:

You know of what a number of various nations the camp is composed, and what jealousies, animosities, and contentions arise amongst them every day. I who (to my shame!) once fought with them against this unhappy city, know every man of the Italian companies, and their captains; and a thousand times have I heard them curse their evil fortune, that condemned them to fight for the benefit of foreigners against their own countrymen. Now then, an opportunity has presented itself—I heard of it this evening—that may wonderfully aid the scheme I have in view. Some Spanish foot-soldiers have killed two Italians, for the purpose of robbing them, and have thrown them down a well; and Vitelli's troops have retaliated on several Spaniards, in a similar manner. Both parties are now highly incensed, and ready, at the slightest provocation, to fall to blows.—The Italians alone will be no match for the rest of the camp; but if we side with them, they will be more than a match for them, and we shall be able to put the Imperialists to the rout, and remain masters of Florence; and should matters turn out well at the first onset, then the whole populace will rise, and we shall have nothing to fear from Malatesta, who is formidable, only so long as the camp is unbroken and entire, and he is able to secure his retreat."

Niccolo's patience would hardly suffice to hear him to the end; raising his voice, he exclaimed:

"He says very true!—who could have thought it?—God bless thee, my son! thou art the saviour of Florence——"

And Fanfulla added with a complacent smile: "And a very good thought too, I declare!" And Lambert and Niccolo's sons, and presently, all the friars, crowding round Troilus, began to discuss his scheme; and turning it over, as one may say, on all sides, they came gradually to approve it more and more, and were of opinion, that it was, if not a plan certain of success, at any rate one that promised so fair, that it ought not to be left untried.

Having then formed their resolution, and embraced one another for very joy, they resolved to set about the execution of their design, without further delay; for, the storm having ceased, and the sky being no longer cloudy, the first streak of dawn began now to be visible, marking with its soft and placid light the line of the eastern horizon; and no time was to be lost.

"Before we stir out," said Niccolo to Father Zaccaria, "be so good as to say mass; for we must begin with God, if we hope for his help."

The friar proceeded to the sacristy, and presently returned with his vestments on, and commenced the mass, which all heard with that silent and fervent devotion, which great and impending dangers usually excite. But Troilus, all the while, though kneeling with the rest, and apparently absorbed in devotion, was thinking to himself: "Well now, we shall be presently sallying out against the camp—we shall certainly get embroiled in a fray;—and Baccio will think as much about extricating me out of this mess, as I do about turning friar! But how can I inform him of matters? I must find Michel at all hazards."

He was in this matter entirely dependent on his servant, that same Michel, whom we met, if the reader recollects, at the Tower del Gallo, and who remaining in the camp, while the siege lasted, had, now it was over, transferred himself within the walls of Florence; and by Troilus's direction, without ever appearing in Niccolo's house, was always hanging about, so that his master might frequently meet him; and that he might be at hand for any casualties that might occur.

After mass, they all received the communion, and Troilus with the rest; when, turning from the altar, under pretext of seeking a quiet corner, where he might attend, undisturbed, to his devotions, he went and took up his position in a side chapel; and here, turning his back to the church, and bending quite down, supporting himself on a bench, he drew forth a piece of paper with a pencil, with which he always went provided against any emergency, and hastily wrote as follows: "They are going out to the camp to stir up the "Italian bands, and embroil them in a quarrel

" with the Spaniards. The attempt has been " made to set in motion the troops of the city ; " and probably they will rise up when the battle " is begun ; wherefore, be on your guard. Keep " strict watch at the gates. Don't forget, that I " have no means of escaping from amongst these " fellows, unless you help me." Having folded the paper, and placed it in his sleeve, he thought to himself :—When I go out of this place, Michel will be waiting about, and I shall be able to send him to Baccio.

Niccolo, in the meantime, having finished his devotions, had risen up ; and all who were present gathering round him, he made them a short address, such as the pressure of the time and the importance of the occasion required. The fatigue of body and anxiety of mind that he had undergone, and above all, the being up all night, had exhausted the poor old man's strength ; he felt himself unable, however strong his inclination might be, to accompany them in this last attempt. The thought of himself, and of the danger to which he would be exposed, would not indeed of itself have been sufficient to restrain him, had he thought that he could render any assistance ; but he felt, that instead of being of any service, he would rather be a hindrance to the young men, who would have enough to do to attend to themselves, without the additional care of him.

" Go," he said at last, embracing one after another, " go, and though I cannot accompany you in person, I shall be with you in heart, and attend you with my prayers; and he whom I shall see no more in this world, I shall see in another."

As he was pronouncing these last words, Bindo's turn came to take a farewell of his father; a sad foreboding (and who can overcome such feelings at certain moments?) seized the old man's mind.—He thought: perhaps this very lad may be one, whom I am to see no more, except in another world!—Niccolo exercised more than human self-control, in order to restrain the tears that were ready to gush out; he knew of what importance it was, to show himself unmoved at such a moment; and trampling under foot every other feeling, he said, with a lofty brow, as he extended his hands towards his son: "O Florence! O my country! nothing else have I left but the lives of these my sons!—I give them to thee———"

Having uttered these words, he sunk down upon a seat, covered his eyes with his hands, and seemed for a moment almost broken-hearted, and ready to sink beneath such terrible and repeated shocks; a confused sound rung in his ears, and feeling his mind becoming weak and wavering, he could not well distinguish whether it was a dream, or whether he really heard the footsteps of his sons, and the rest of the people going out of the church.

After a good while, his spirits somewhat reviving, he opened his eyes and looked round; Father Zaccaria was at his side, and some other friars, who were at their devotions. All the rest were gone.

When the latter had reached the cloisters, and before going out into the street, Troilus said—"It is of the utmost importance, that we should make our way safely to the soldiers' quarters; and though, at the gates, they are not very strict, and allow free communication between the camp and the city, yet I think we had better not all go out in a body;—that might excite suspicion; but let us go, two or three together, and let our rendezvous be Giramonte, where Alessandro Vitelli is posted. It is in his bands, as I told you, that the dissensions have arisen; so let us begin with them. Now just let me go out alone into the great square, and see whether anything is likely to stop us, either in the direction of De Servi, or the Via Larga. I'll just run round hereabouts, and be back in a trice."

Troilus set off, and Averardo, looking after him, said—"If anybody had told me, that this fellow would ever become one of us, I should have told him he lied!—I declare he's more hot in the cause than any of us!"

"Didn't I tell you so?" cried Bindo; "he was led away by vicious habits and bad company; but at heart, he's a brave and noble fellow. Besides, we now see his actions.—"

Whilst they were extolling this traitor to the skies, with praises more extravagant than are here recorded, he had sallied forth into the public square, and found it quite empty; except that, on glancing round, he discerned at the corner of the street Della Sapienza a small section of a human face peeping out, so that just one eye and the tip of the nose was distinguishable. He hastened to the spot, and found his servant crouching down, round the corner of the street. He gave his letter into his hand, saying to him hurriedly—"Run at the top of your speed, and take this to Baccio, and tell him—be sure you don't make a mistake—that I shall go out of the city by St. George's Gate, in half an hour,—and this will serve to regulate his movements. Now run, and if you don't arrive time enough, look out for another world for yourself—you understand me; I never jest!"

The servant, who knew the man he had to deal with, was off and out of sight in an instant; and Troilus endeavoured to delay matters as much as possible, in order to give Michel time to get there, and yet not in such a way, as to excite the suspicion of those with whom he was acting. At last, returning to the convent, he said, with a view to gain a minute or two more—"I have seen some soldiers coming in the direction of the Via del Cocomero—they are going to relieve the guard,—let us wait a bit."

At length, when it appeared time, they began to issue forth, three and four at a time; arranging it so, that every company took a different route through the city. Troilus, by various devices, dexterously managed to be among the last; and finally sallied forth with Bindo and Fanfulla, taking the direction of St. George's Gate. Passing the Ponte

Alle Grazie, they went up the hill by the street De Bardi; and Troilus, who had selected this gate to go out by, as being the farthest off, with the object of giving Baccio time to aid him in some way or other, was worrying his brains, as he went along, as to the means Baccio would adopt; not altogether without some misgiving, that after involving him in this labyrinth, he would leave him to get out as he best could.

But Baccio had further need of his services, and therefore had not neglected him. As they continued ascending the hill, without meeting a single person, for the sun had scarcely appeared above the hills of Vallombrosa, and whilst Troilus was looking first forwards and then backwards, expecting some rescue, they perceived, at a gentle turn of the road, which discloses St. George's Gate to view, a Minor friar advancing towards them, who, apparently about to pass on without taking any notice, all at once stopped, as if recognising one of the party, and exclaimed: "Hollo! what you here, Sir Troilus? And whither are you for?"

Troilus did not know the person of the friar, but it struck him at once, that he was sent by Baccio, and so he did what he could, to let him see that he guessed his business.

"And you, father, whence do you come?"

"I come from the camp;—you know, I suppose, that the habit of St. Francis is a better defence than a coat of mail; and with it, one can go to and fro without fear of danger.—But you, surely, are not going to the camp,—eh?"—

"Well—suppose I am going there?"

"God deliver you from it.—Get you hence, with all the speed you can—and from Florence too, 'twill be best for you.—Why, don't you know Don Ferrante has set a price of 400 florins on your head, to take vengeance on you for having fought in the ranks of the Florentines?—And only this moment, here outside the gate, I have passed a company of landsknechts, who evidently know your person, and who declare that if they meet you, they'll cut you to pieces."

Troilus, in order to act out his part, thanked the friar, but still showed an intention to continue his route, notwithstanding; but the friar caught him by his cloak, declaring he would, on no account, suffer him to rush upon certain destruction. And Fanfulla and Bindo, well aware that it would never do to excite an altercation and create a disturbance, while they were preparing for so important an enterprise; and that at all events, they alone would not have it in their power to rescue their companion, persuaded him to turn back; and Fanfulla taking him aside, out of the friar's hearing, said to him: "Go, go; for even in Florence, you will be able to do us some service;—by speaking to the soldiers, as I did yesterday, and urging them, when they hear the attack is commenced, to sally out; and in the midst of such comrades, you'll not be afraid of the landsknechts." And without waiting for a reply, he turned away and went off with Bindo; whilst Troilus, laughing in his sleeve, went back, down the hill, in company with the friar.

Fanfulla then, as he went along with his youthful comrade, towards the gate, observed: "It's lucky that we met this Franciscan.—Had it not been for him, God knows what mess we might have got into!—and in these matters, a mere trifle is enough to spoil any stratagem."

St. George's Gate was kept by a strong guard, on whom Malatesta could rely; they did not interfere with the citizens, in their going to and fro to the camp, except during the night. Fanfulla was recognised and saluted by several of the soldiers; and as he passed under the massive gateway, which is still standing at the present day, some said one thing, and some another to him.—"Hollo! there's Fanfulla!—You're up early, brother Bombard!—Where are you going so early this morning?" etc. etc.

Whilst he, without stopping, and merely waving his hand in reply to their salutations, said: "I am going to see some friends in the camp, now that our prison doors are open.—Fare you well, good friends, we shall meet again if it please God and the Holy Virgin!"—And away he went, without awaiting their reply.

If our reader was ever at Florence, and if he ever chanced to take a walk outside of this gate, from which Bindo and Fanfulla issued, he will remember, that from the foot of the city walls, looking southward, are seen, rising with a gradual ascent, those beautiful hills, the summits of which are marked by a gentle undulation, and their sides sprinkled with thick clumps of olive-trees, with rows of vines interspersed, partly green, and partly of a whitish-grey colour, like that of the willow; he will remember those little cottages, those small villas, which rise up clean and white among the olives, and which inspire envy in the beholder; especially, if he chance to be in melancholy mood, and is pondering over his sorrows, as if they had no right to intrude within those walls, beneath those tranquil shades!—and yet who can tell, how many sorrows there are, even in those calm retreats!—he will remember, in fine, the peaceful and smiling aspect of this rural spot, with all the variety of nature herself, and yet at the same time, as neat and orderly as a garden.—At the period of our story, however, after it had been eleven months overrun by the enemy, the whole of that lovely scene had been changed into a wilderness, all bare and swampy; no longer any trace of hedgerows, or of landmarks between the farms; the vines rooted up, and trampled under foot; the olive-trees cut down at the stem for fire-wood, or if here and there one remained to mark their former richness, they were hacked and mutilated, or mere shapeless trunks, stript of their boughs, full of incisions, and perforated with bullets. The earth, in various places, was torn up and furrowed by the cannon-balls, no less than by the torrents of rain. Such was the appearance of the ground, between the walls and the intrenchments, which latter encircled the hill, like a girdle, midway below Giramonte, consisting of a trench, behind which arose a rampart, surmounted by a chevaux-de-frise, and provided with port-holes.

Whilst Bindo and Fanfulla were directing their steps towards a bend in the hill, which formed one of the approaches to the camp, they could already hear that something extraordinary was going on, or was about to take place, from the confused uproar that proceeded from that direction, from the calling and shouting, the hurrying of the soldiers along the passages between the tents and encampments, and along the trenches; for their camp being pitched on the brow of the hill, one could take in the whole range at a single glance, and it presented that appearance of general confusion and bustling excitement, which one may observe in an ant-hill, when from any cause or other it is thrown into disorder.

Having at last made their way into the camp, and continuing to ascend, in order to gain the eminence on which Giramonte is situated, they passed between tents constructed in numberless ways, of planks, hurdles, mud or stubble, put together, in the best way that could be devised by those, who had to pass several months in them, and who were bent upon providing themselves with the most convenient lodging they could;

some, the worst constructed, half demolished by the storm of the past night, were quite in ruins, with their beams and stakes sticking up and bristling in all directions, still wet and dripping with the rain; on many, clothes were laid out to dry in the sun, or their accoutrements were hanging up outside, whilst boys and servants were occupied in hastily mending and cleaning them, urged on by their masters, who were in a hurry to equip themselves. Amongst these servants, many, by their long hair, and by the shape of their bosoms, and the form of their waists, betrayed the male garments which they wore. They were women and young girls (at that time there were in the camp some of all nations) who had either been carried off in the sack of some town, and subjected by a harsh and brutal master to the most menial duties; or whose affections having been seduced, had escaped from their home with some soldier or other; who, now that his lust was satiated, merely tolerated them on the sole condition, of their acting as servants, and performing such offices as were required.

Every moment they passed sheds or awnings, beneath which the vivandiers and vintners discharged the duties of the kitchen, or sold wine; some wretched little urchin, besmeared with filth, would be turning huge spits before the fire, over which capacious pots were at the same time set to boil. At certain long and ill-arranged tables, or before casks set on end to serve the purpose of one, were soldiers, hastening to finish the last mouthful, to join those who were hurrying, helter-skelter, to Giramonte. Shouting, laughing, and sounds of wild merriment greeted their ears; the loud and earnest tones of a hundred voices, at one time deep and sonorous, at another hoarse or shrill, were to be heard; and each wanted to put in his speech about the conduct of the Spaniards; but it was impossible to gather the meaning of a single word in that uproar and confusion, increased at one moment by the barking of a dog, at another by a drummer—who for practice was battering away at a chest—at another, by a pig, which, being tied by the leg to a stake, was writhing and twisting about, and filling the air with his shrill and infernal squeaking.

Fanfulla and Bindo, passing onward among the various groups, and observing with great delight the excellent disposition they evinced for an insurrection, arrived at last at the open space on which stands the Castle of Giramonte. It is a plain of tolerable dimensions, from whence you have a view of the whole of Florence, the mountains of Fesolé, and the Val d'Arno, from the hills of Incontro to those of Artimino. Here, on the summit that looks down upon the city, a battery of twenty-four pieces of ordnance was ranged, separated by huge wicker gabions, full of earth and stones; and here the crowd of soldiers was unusually numerous, and closely packed; the very windows of the castle were thronged by them; they occupied the baggage-waggons of the company, and stood in rows by the walls. They were mounted on the guns, on the gabions, on every elevated spot; and were all eagerly listening to Lambert, who, having also got on to the top of a gabion, was speaking in a loud voice with earnest and excited gesticulations; and when these two arrived within sound of his voice, he was saying, in concluding a sentence of which they had not heard the former part:

"—Of your comrades, whom those miscreants have assassinated! But are we to take vengeance for them only? I say, that this whole nation, in which they have been and are plundering, every day, in a thousand ways, I say for her also we must take vengeance, and free ourselves at once from these assassins! But tell me, by heaven!—and if I don't speak the truth, hurl me down from this trench—tell me! do we go to their country, to live as we please, to rob, to ravish their wives, to murder, to irritate them by a thousand devices, and set them one against the other, as mastiffs are goaded on for the pleasure of seeing them tear each other to pieces? But they, they're always here; sometimes on one pretext, sometimes on another; at one time, by sea; at another, by land; at all times, and without any warning, a band of these cut-throats, of these miserable wretches, half-clad and half-starved, who want to be set up again:—Where shall we go? say they;—Oh! into Italy! Let us go, in God's name, to Italy!—But let me ask, is the land in which we were born, and where our forefathers lie buried, a free soil to every invader? is it common property? God who has given to every people a sufficient portion of land for them to live on, and die in peace—where they might sow and reap—has He ever said:—that this country alone of all others may be his, who covets it, may be his, who can take it, may be the property of anybody; and that he who has not sown in it, may reap? Are we, I should like to know, cursed by God? Are we base-born wretches? Are we brute-beasts?—Would you know what we are? I have told you what we are, but you were not attending! We are,—brute-beasts, and worse! for even brutes, if they are disturbed in their lair, defend themselves, and make use of claws and teeth, careless as to whether the enemy is more powerful than themselves.—And cannot men do, at least, as much as that?—And let no man tell me, that they are more powerful and valiant than we! Men are all equal; and it is only bad customs and evil habits, that corrupt them and make them to differ.—And in proof of this, as often as you have encountered them in fair fight, man to man, who has had the knocks, I should like to know?—we or they? And look you" (he pointed to Fanfulla, whom he had discovered in the crowd) "look you there—if I tell a lie, let him call me an arrant knave—"

All eyes were turned to see whom he alluded to; whilst he went on to say:

"Fanfulla, who was one of the thirteen at Barletta, let him tell you:—how went the matter there? who conquered? And to fight those thirteen Frenchmen, was there an edict sent throughout Italy, to summon the bravest and most valiant? did they wait, to collect together taller and larger men than their antagonists? did they match two against one?—Thirteen of them,—thirteen of us; of those who happened to be in the camp at the moment. They chose the best of them, it is true; but so did our opponents. And who conquered? I ask again. They are not then more valiant, but more cunning; or, to speak more truly, they are knaves and tricksters, for they know how to sow discord between us, and to destroy us by our own hands.

"But what unlucky infatuation, what cursed plague is this, I should like to know? what demon is it, that darts his poison into our hearts, that we are always cutting one another's throats? we, who are brethren! we, who are of one blood, one language, and one family! How is it that one city or another, either by arms, or plots, or by nefarious practices, but always in some way or other, is ever bent on wreaking injury and ruin on those of the same race?—And he is thought happy, who succeeds—it is considered a glorious achievement! And when we cannot do one another an injury—so that our will to do it may not be quite lost, and that our animosity may be kept alive—then we irritate each other with insults and injurious epithets—calling the men of

Pisa, traitors; the Florentines, blind; the people of Siena, fools; and such like. And not only between city and city, between one state and another; but every town, every hamlet, every village, cherishes hostility to its neighbours, irritates and injures them; and if it can do nothing else, at least hates them."

And pointing to the city that lay below, he continued:

" And here is a too recent example!—Florence that was rich, free and happy, that was the pride and glory of Italy, the mother of wisdom, the fosterer of knowledge, and patroness of every elegant art—this base born pope one day says: *Florence must be mine.*—The first thing, as usual, is to summon those Spaniards, those brigands, to help him! Catch them waiting for a second invitation! You may imagine whether they ran or no!—a chance of sacking Florence!—and what are the other cities of Italy doing all this time? What is Venice about,—and Siena, and Genoa? Venice makes her glorious truce with the emperor, abjures her promises, and looks on!—Siena even sends artillery to aid in the destruction of her neighbour."—

And glancing at a large culverin, that was close to him, and striking it with his foot with marks of scorn and anger, he exclaimed: " And these guns, that I should like to crush with my heel into powder, do they not belong to the Sienese? Are they not Italian arms? And you, you, my friends!

—let me ask you, by Heaven! and be not angry with me—are you not all Italians? and have you not assisted in effecting the downfall of this glorious city?—And what good is it to you, now that you see it lying at your feet, poor, enslaved, trampled on, and insulted?—What advantages do you reap? Numberless hardships, and wounds, and that miserable pittance of pay—if you ever get it! And the treasures, and the power, to whose lot do they fall? to the lot of these brigands, who for all this despise us, and call us traitors and cowards. But if instead of aiding them, you had assisted your brothers, think you, your gain would have been less? And even if it were,—the honour and glory of your own Italy, surely you do not lightly regard that!—And then, after all, what is the number of the men that we have to contend against?—Are there millions, so that they are ten against one?—They are but a few thousands. And are not you a part? Are not the Italian bands, almost half of the whole camp!—and if the Italians within the walls combine with you, will you not be strong enough to exterminate at once these plundering assassins? For this purpose, I and my comrades here, and Fanfulla, who is the pride and flower of our profession, we are come to offer ourselves to you, and to conquer or die with you; and as soon as we join in the melée, our friends will sally forth from the gates and assail the enemy in flank and rear, and with such effect, that we shall, at one blow, rid the city of these robbers and assassins!

Now then, in God's name, whoever has a heart in his bosom, whoever has a mind to abide by my offer, let him lift up his hand; and he who has not—we'll do without him. Hurra! for the Italian bands! Hurra! for Florence!—"

As Lambert uttered this cry, he drew his sword from its scabbard, and waving it above his head, flourished it rapidly in all directions; and throughout all the crowd at his feet, who, till that minute, had been like a sea of faces, there was seen nothing but hands violently waving to and fro, and the brandishing of swords, pikes, and arquebusses, accompanied with fierce shouts of: "Viva Italia! Death to the Spaniards!"

The unanimity of these people being apparently so great, Lambert leaped down from the gabion in high spirits, and together with his relatives, with Fanfulla and all who had accompanied him from Florence, proceeded to range themselves under their standards; whilst the captains and other officers of the Italian bands hastened to muster and draw up their men, who with the utmost promptness, and in the most orderly manner (like veteran troops) fell into their ranks, every man round his own flag.

But what was Vitelli, the chief officer of these Italian troops, doing all the while? How was Don Ferrante occupied, the commander-in-chief of the army, upon being informed of this commotion, and hearing those shouts, that indicated a rising disaffection, and perhaps an open rebellion? They did pretty much as the keepers do with the herds of wild horses and colts in the plains of Rome; who in ordinary cases reduce these animals to obedience in the best way they can; but when, as it sometimes happens, an awkward temper seems to take possession of any of them, and they become unruly, running and snorting, with nostrils distended and tail erect, and begin kicking and biting one another, and performing numberless strange antics and carracoles; then the trainer endeavours, by voice and gesture, to reduce them to some degree of order, but still making them go round, and keeping himself at a prudent distance from their gambols; and then if he finds that all is of no avail, he looks on and waits till they're tired.

Just so did Don Ferrante; and it was not unfrequently necessary for commanders in that age, to submit to be commanded as well as to command, to the sorrow and misfortune of the unhappy people, in whose country the war was carried on; on whom, besides the usual and inevitable miseries of war, there fell a thousand incidental sufferings, resulting from the licentiousness and wanton cruelty of the soldiery.

CHAPTER V.

It had already been daylight, about two hours, when the bands of Vitelli, which had been joined by all the other Italian troops in the camp, were on the point of moving forward, to go and attack the Spaniards. The sky, having been swept by the storm of the preceding night, was quite resplendent with a pure, transparent azure, shading off, towards the horizon, into a rich golden colour ; athwart which shot long streaks of clouds, lightly reposing on the crests of the mountains, on whose sides, the shadows projected by the clouds were spread, like patches of dark blue, whilst the spots, on which the sun's rays fell, were coloured with the various tints, which embellish the country towards the close of the summer. The whole heaven was like a sea of the purest and most beautiful light, which rendered distant objects minutely distinct ; so that the Italians, who were collected at Giramonte, were clearly seen from all parts of the camp ; and the soldiers collecting on every little eminence, on the intrenchments, on every rising hill, were intently watching their movements, like spectators at a fair, all curious and eager, expecting to see some extraordinary exhibition.

On the esplanade of the Tower del Gallo, which at a short distance commands Giramonte, was Don Ferrante Gonzaga, Alessandro Vitelli, the Count Pier Maria, and many of the chiefs of the army; and as they watched, with anything but pleasure, the grave and serious character of the commotion, they stood in an attitude of bewildered amazement, like the horse-trainer, who just now served us for a comparison. They saw how the matter was likely to begin, but it was beyond their power to conjecture, how it was likely to end; and they knew very well, that it is with soldiers as with young horses, (here too our comparison holds good) that if one begins to skit about, he, by his example, causes a hundred to break loose.

On the other side, the Spanish troops, posted on the slope of a hill beneath Belle-garde and Mount Olivet, perceiving what was preparing for them, hastened to arm, and to fall in; although it was with a very bad will, that they found themselves on the point of embroiling themselves with the Italians; not from want of courage, for they were a brave and valiant set of men, but because, instead of quarrelling, they would much rather have joined heart and hand with them in entering and sacking Florence. As they could hardly bring themselves to forego the hope of this glorious sack, they determined to send two of their officers to Don Ferrante, entreating him to interpose, and leaving it to him to fix what satisfaction, consistently with a regard to their honour, they should make to the Italians, in order to restore a mutual good understanding, and efface the sense of past injury. The messengers departed, and arriving at the Tower del Gallo, they explained the purport of their visit to the commander-in-chief. He listened with evident ill-humour depicted in his countenance, standing all the while with his arms folded on his breast; and at last said, in a peevish tone: "Who do you think can induce those furious devils to listen to reason?—And there is so much time too, to set about such a task, in God's truth! —Eh! look!—"

And indeed, just at that instant, the air was filled with their shouts, and resounded with the loud tones of the different officers, who were making the necessary dispositions to advance, with the rapid and rolling sound of the drums, and the shrill strain of the flageolets. They saw those deep and compact ranks (for the light columns of modern infantry were not then in use,) all bristling and gleaming with halberds and pikes, just like the comb of a wool-carder, turned upside down; they saw them make those first slow and undulating movements, which are observable in a squadron, on the point of moving forward; they heard the heavy and measured tramp of so many feet; and in truth, the appearance of these troops was not calculated to inspire much hope, that they could be controlled or guided, at will, by mere words.

The battalions meantime came on, descending the hill, at one time with an unbroken line, at another, making a slight deflection from the direct course, and sometimes even breaking rank, and then presently re-forming, according to the nature of the ground over which they passed; but always in good order. In front, and flanking the main body of halberdiers, of which the troops principally consisted, there marched a number of arquebusiers supporting with their left hand the stock of their weapon, which rested on their shoulder, and with their right carrying the stand and the lighted cord. Some, instead of arquebusses bore erect, with their points upward, large two-handed swords, of the sort, which hanging up now-a-days as ornaments in our halls, draw from those who see them for the first time, that exclamation of astonishment:—"What strong arms our ancestors must have had!" The captains and serjeants, marching boldly in front with their drawn swords, and shields or targes on their arms, all inlayed and wrought with gold, with a fringe round the outermost border, and a sharp boss in the centre, were equipped in steel corslets, and cuisses, beneath which there descended, as far as the knee, breeches gathered all down at intervals with stripes of cloth, whilst the legs, covered with tightly fitting hose, displayed muscles, such as left no reason to fear, that they would ever succumb to any amount of exertion. We shall not stop to speak of their bronzed faces, to which there was added a fierce and martial expression, by their beards and whiskers, which were so thick as to show nothing but the eyes and nose: nor of their singular carriage, and swaggering gait, as they moved along, which was according to the manner of soldiers of that period.—To give an idea of such minute particulars, no less than of the marshalling of armies in those times, the pencil is of more service than the pen; and a single glance at the pictures of Vasari in the Palazzo Vecchio, or at some engraving of the sixteenth century, would explain all this, better than any description.

Whilst these troops were advancing thus resolutely to the assault, it appeared to Don Ferrante, that it hardly comported with his position, to let such a disorderly proceeding take place without any attempt at preventing it; and not afraid of compromising his authority, which he knew was not very great over the army, mounting his mule and followed by Vitelli and other officers, he descended the hill, to meet the insurgents. When he came up to them, he raised his hand, making a sign to the drummers to stop, and indicating a wish to speak; but neither did the drums cease beating, nor the soldiers pay the least regard to him, but continued marching forward, eyeing him with fierce looks; whilst their commanding officers treated him in a similar way. Whereupon, raising his voice to a louder pitch, he tried to make himself heard above the uproar; but only a word here and there could rise to the surface and be saved, as one may say, from the general shipwreck of his address. But he, on his part, did not fail to catch the many abusive expressions, that were hurled at him from the ranks, by lungs that knew how to breathe force into them, and make them heard above the sounds of fife and drum; and one voice especially was heard, loud above the rest, more like the bellowing of a bull: Be off, be off, you frog-eater!—alluding to the quantities of them that are found in the marshes about Mantua, which was Don Ferrante's birth-place. Finding at last, that all his efforts were fruitless, he gave over his vain attempt, and, sulkily turning away his mule, retreated amidst a not very courteous accompaniment of hisses, groans and execrations.

When the bands had gained the plain of Baroncelli, where at the present day stands the Poggio Imperiale, and whence, after proceeding a few paces, they would have to descend the hill in order to reach the spot where they saw the Spaniards drawn up ready to receive them, they halted a moment in order to form their ranks in close array.

Amid the foremost rows were Averardo and Vieri, armed with two long partisans, and by their side were ranged, with arquebusses, Lambert, Fanfulla, and Bindo; whilst every one was examining his arms, and getting them in readiness—one drawing his buckles tighter, another fastening his morion more securely, another blowing on his lighted cord to prevent its going out, and the officers inspecting the ranks, ordering first one and then another to change his place, as they thought best, with reference to the size and strength of the different men; Lambert was watching the Spaniards, who were drawn up at the further extremity of the little valley, on the other side of the Roman road, which crosses it. He saw those compact squadrons of men, of the middle height only, it is true, but robust and well-limbed, who had grown old in service, and were the best infantry at that time in Europe. Foreseeing what a fierce encounter it would prove, he had the gravest apprehensions for Bindo, who stood in the very front, quite unsheltered, like a racer at the starting-post, eager to join battle. To attempt to withdraw him from his position, was not to be thought of. Lambert therefore made a sign to Fanfulla; and though without saying a word, to prevent its being overheard by the lad, he yet conveyed his meaning so precisely by his look and gesture—which was, Let us keep close to him to protect him—that Fanfulla immediately understood him, and by a nod intimated that he did so, better than even words could have done it.

Lambert, having settled this point, turned to the soldiers, who, by tacit consent, from having heard his bold and spirited harangue, regarded him in this affair almost in the light of their leader, and raising his voice so as to be heard by as many as possible, he said, while his countenance was irradiated with a noble and enthusiastic ardour:

"Now then, my brothers, we are going for once to fight, not for those who pay us and despise us at the same time, but for ourselves, and for our own nation, to decide, please God, whether the Italians deserve to be the prey of all the rest of the world—the laughing-stock and scorn of all men. Thank Heaven that even this once, it has fallen to my lot to fight against people, amongst whom I do not see a single Italian face! For the present, I say no more.—Florence has her eyes on us—the whole camp, the flower of all the chivalry of Europe, have their eyes upon us. If any man's heart fails, there is yet time, let him go in God's name.—Whoever loves his country, whoever is ambitious of fame and glory, let him follow me; and if I draw back—if I fly—let him kill me."

The drums sounded the advance, and to the cry of *Viva Italia!* which burst forth and was re-echoed a thousand times, all the bands moved forward together; and descending the hill at a quick pace with levelled pikes, they arrived at the bottom, and crossing the road dashed at the Spaniards; who, immoveable and answering with the cry of—*Viva España*, with their lances couched low, and their red and yellow banners waving in the wind, awaited their attack, amid the sound of drums, of fifes and other martial music, which rising up to the sky, was reverberated by the echo, and replied to by the distant shouts of the whole camp. Before the two hostile forces came into close conflict, the shower of arquebuss-shots had already begun, and here and there you might see the soldiers stop, rapidly plant their arquebuss upon its stand, discharge it, and then again reload as they advanced forward; and those squadrons that just before appeared so spruce and smart, with arms glittering and plumes waving, were every here and there, in different parts, intercepted from the view, being involved in clouds of smoke, which rose up all on a sudden, and then, curling round and round in thick and whitish folds, quickly cleared off, rarefied and dispersed by the wind.

But when the first rank of the Italian bands, charging with the utmost fury, and pressed on by the dense columns in their rear, came to close quarters with the Spanish troops, then there arose a fresh and louder clashing of weapons, and of armour striking against armour, resembling that deep and hoarse roaring of the sea, when it breaks upon a distant ledge of rocks; or rather, the tremendous crash of two vast ships of war, when driven against each other by the violence of the tempest.

The shouts of those who were looking down upon this terrible scene, ceased all at once, and every sound was hushed, as they gazed intently, and with astonishment on those two bodies of men, so locked together in close encounter, that they seemed to form but a single mass. They watched the ebb and flow of that surging host, now losing, now recovering their ground, and that forest of pikes, now advancing, now receding, in the midst of which, swayed by its movements, pennons, flags, and plumes of a thousand colours floated high above the glittering weapons. They saw, in the thickest and hottest part of the fight, the rapid flashing, the dazzling and erratic gleaming of the arms, which, being wielded with the utmost rapidity, reflected in a thousand directions the rays of the sun. They saw, every moment, breaches made in the ranks by the sudden fall of the killed or wounded; but their vacant places were filled up in an instant; for others, trampling on those who were down, without stopping to see whether they were friends or enemies, immediately occupied their place, often destined to fall themselves a few moments after. Whenever the smoke rising thicker in some one part, spread its shade over the combatants, the shots of the guns appeared more distinct in that dark spot, being accompanied by a bright and frequent flashing of tongues of flame, which presently became pale or altogether disappeared, when the light of the sun succeeded to the clouds of smoke.

In spite of the tremendous and discordant uproar, produced by the incessant discharge of the musketry, the rapid beating of the drums, the fierce onslaught and mutual blows, there arose every now and then, high above the general din, a fierce shout of victory, from whichever side seemed to obtain a slight advantage over the other; and at one moment the cry of *Italy*, at another that of *Spain*, resounded through the air, and was taken up by the spectators, who uttered similar cries, accompanied with shouts of encouragement and the clapping of hands, just as the ancients used to do, when they witnessed in the circus the games of the gladiators.

But this sight, which, when viewed in the distance, appeared so splendid, and had about it, I was going to say, a certain charm, and a magnificence derived from the glitter of the arms, the richness of the various colours and the waving plumes, together with the loveliness of the sky, which gilded the whole scene; when viewed close, was beyond all description terrible and bloody. The dogged obstinacy of the contest, in which the soldiers suffered themselves to be run through, sooner than yield their ground an inch, rendered it a better fate for those who fell, to fall from a mortal wound, than not wounded at all; for in that case, a more wretched end awaited them, expiring in the utmost agony, by being trampled to death; for beneath their feet, the combatants could hear (for see they could not, owing to the densely packed mass) wild shrieks, blasphemous imprecations, groans, and moaning cries, and sometimes some piteous voice calling upon God. The blood, from the ground being on a slight incline, ran in all directions in small streams, which, meeting, formed pools of blood in the low and hollow spots, so numerous had been the slain within little more than half an hour from the commencement of the fight; without its being possible as yet, in any wise, to foretel which party was likely to bear off the honours of the day. But it was not possible that so furious an engagement could remain long undecided; and the balance was now on the point of turning.

Our young men who, with Fanfulla, had been fighting amongst the foremost with that bravery and impetuosity, that can easily be imagined, fighting constantly close to their flag, quite out of breath, covered with blood and sweat, and amid heaps of slain, owing to which they could barely maintain their footing; for the ground, even in spots not covered by the slain was nothing but mud, all slippery and drenched with blood; our young heroes, I say, saw in front, amid a crowd of the enemy, the principal flag of the Spanish bands, borne by a standard-bearer, a man of fierce aspect, and, what was a rare circumstance among them, of very lofty stature and colossal dimensions.

Lambert, knowing that the critical moment was come, that in battle always determines the victory, which ever rests with him who knows how to seize it, making a sign to Fanfulla, who at that moment was forcibly tugging at his sword to extricate it from the body of a Spaniard, whom he had struck down, and was saying: "These fellows are like cats, they have seven lives and a bit; and until they bite the dust, they won't die!" Lambert, I say, shouted to his comrades: "The flag, my brave fellows, down with the flag, and the day is ours!"

And making a dashing charge all together, like so many lions, towards the spot, he, before anybody else, with his usual rapidity of movement, and before any of the enemy had time to stop him, plunged his sword into the bowels of the flag-bearer, and forcing it forward, with the hilt he bore him to the ground, flag and all, which being of a very large size and unfurled by the wind, overlapped several of the soldiers; and they, from their view being thus intercepted, and deprived of the power to use their hands freely, got into some confusion, while endeavouring to extricate themselves from beneath its folds; just as it happens to the galley-slaves on board ship, when the mast, giving way, comes toppling down, bringing with it sails and all in one general wreck and confusion.

Our combatants lost not a moment; and some with daggers, others with knives, dealing their blows beneath the flag, permitted very few of those who were thus entangled to get free; and almost all fell, pierced with numberless wounds, one on the top of the other in a vast heap; so that Lambert, having cleared a small space, seized the flag, and turning it upside down, fixed its gilded point in the ground; and seizing Bindo by the arm, who was rushing furiously upon the enemy, as they were coming up on all sides, said: "Do you guard this flag, for, please God, the victory is ours!"

Lambert knew that the last and most bloody conflict must take place around this flag, and assigning to Bindo the honour of holding it, he succeeded, by this pretext, in placing him in the centre of his friends, and in the least exposed position of the field.

Indeed the Spaniards, upon seeing their flag on the ground, made a rush from all sides on this point; but the Italians also rallied in like manner to the same point, with exulting and enthusiastic shouts of victory, so that there was collected around Bindo a mass of men, so compact and closely wedged together, that it was impossible to use their swords and lances; and not without some difficulty could they use their poniards, which, owing to the confined space, they could only, so to speak, work like screw-drivers, which however they did with the most deadly rage; and in this close encounter, as they pressed one against the other, their shields and breast-plates rung again, when they came into collision; while each one could feel on his face the warm breath of his opponent, and life or death depended on having the good fortune to be the first in finding, in their blind and random thrusts, a passage for their weapon through their adversary's armour; so that it sometimes happened, that, when two of them were locked together in deadly strife, with their teeth set, and their countenances inflamed with fury, dealing their random blows, in the way we have mentioned, you would see, all at once, the living expression fade in the countenance of one of them, the eyes lose their lustre, the pupils roll round, and the head fall on one side; whilst the body, supported by the close pressure of the crowd, was perhaps a minute or two before it fell to the ground.

But when the strength, the courage, and the obstinacy of contending forces are pretty nearly equal, a trifle is often sufficient to decide the victory. The captured flag produced an immediate and powerful effect on the minds of those who were fighting in a distant part of the field; diminishing the spirit of the Spaniards, and increasing that of the Italians, who were still more inflamed by the incessant cry, which struck upon their ears, of *Victory! victory!* at that spot, to which, on account of the standard, the most important part of the action was now confined. The most marvellous exertions were made, both in defending, and in attempting to recover it; and as, owing to the numbers of the slain, the pressure of the crowd had now been considerably diminished, so that the combatants had more room for their movements, and could use their weapons more freely, a Spaniard was seen, making his way over the dead bodies that lay in his path, and approaching the lost flag, attempting to seize it, whilst Bindo, with the hand he had free, made a thrust at him with his sword, and stretched him dead at his feet. But another and another followed, making a rush at the flag-staff, and using incredible efforts to wrest it from Bindo's grasp, who was now assisted in holding it by some few others; who kept still fighting on; one minute fighting, and the next pulling and tugging, and making the most tremendous exertions to keep their hold, raging and foaming, falling down and getting up again; till Averardo, who had been pressing on the enemy till he had got to some little distance, seeing the danger of his brother, and those about him, came up, and raising, as high as he could, his enormous two-handed sword, brought it down with a tremendous blow on the most obstinate of the Spaniards, so as to cleave his helmet, at the same time exclaiming ferociously: "Carry that home with you from the sack of Florence, thou miscreant!"—And in this way, still shouting and calling out, he had, with incredible rapidity, killed a second, and wounded a third; and as he wielded his sword, which was not so much seen, as heard, by its whizzing noise in passing through the air, he exclaimed at every blow: "To the sack!—to the sack of Florence, my gallant fellows!—for in Spain they are waiting to hear the tidings!"

The standard, however, though its staff was broken, and the flag torn to shreds, and bespattered with blood and dirt, remained in the hands of the Italians; who, rendered proud by this glorious achievement, and seeing every minute, whilst they were fighting, the spectators on the surrounding heights, raising their arms, and waving anything that served for a flag, as if to cheer them on; and seeing too some companies of men sallying forth from the gates of Florence, and fancying they must be some of their own party coming to their aid, as they had promised, they shouted louder than ever, *Victory! Victory!* and *Italy for ever!* and so simultaneous, so impetuous and vigorous was their attack on the enemy, that they now began to show signs of giving way; and as the courage and efforts of the Italians increased, the Spaniards began evidently to flag, but yet defending themselves so fiercely, that they could not be said to be put to the rout.

"Here they are! here they are!" shouted our youthful heroes; and the captains of the Italian bands pointing to the troops, that had just issued from the gate of San Friano, exclaimed: "See, our friends are coming!"

This gave an additional stimulus to their courage and impetuosity; to some, from the certainty of succour, to others, from their wish to prevent them from coming up to share the glory of the victory. The Spaniards, meantime, were losing ground more and more; so that some began to fly openly, and quit their ranks, closely pursued by the Italians, now intoxicated with a ferocious joy; and by this movement, the two parties shifting their position, the spot where they had fought was found covered with more than six hundred dead bodies.

But why did the troops, who had just issued from the city, delay to come up? Because, instead of having, as the combatants imagined, come to join them, they had been despatched by Malatesta, who had selected them of Corsicans and his own

Perugians, men of tried fidelity to his person, merely to see how the affair was likely to terminate, and at the same time to overawe any soldiers in Florence, who might be disposed to get up an insurrection, and sally out to the assistance of their countrymen. Such was the consequence that had resulted from the note, that Troilus had written in St. Mark's church.

However, even without these reinforcements, victory had now decided for the Italians; but it was ordained that, on this occasion also, the blood of so many brave and noble Italians should be shed in torrents, without any beneficial results. The landsknechts, who amounted to several thousands, of first-rate veteran troops, regarding this engagement as a private quarrel between one nation and another, on a point of honour, had promised to take no part in it, either for one side or the other; and had remained under arms and ready indeed, but as mere idle spectators of the combat in their quarters. When Don Ferrante learnt that the Italians were gaining the day, and were pursuing their success with such determination, he was afraid lest they should succeed in routing their enemies, and putting them to the sword; and although he was not exactly aware of the scheme of the Piagnoni for stirring up the soldiers, who were within the walls, in favour of their countrymen in the camp, yet he had his fears that such a thing might very likely take place; and he saw what disastrous consequences would result, if it did, to the Imperial army, and to their enterprise, which was just now on the point of being brought to so favourable a termination. Coming up hastily therefore to the landsknechts, and meeting Tanusio their captain, he said to him, pretending to know for certain, that which he only conjectured, that the Italians both within the city and without, had concerted an attack on all the foreign soldiers, that were engaged in the siege; and that they had begun with the Spaniards; but that, if they left them time enough to rout them utterly, they would then come down, in full force, on the landsknechts; wherefore he advised them to look to themselves, and not to say afterwards, that he had given them no warning. As he spoke, he pointed out to Tanusio the bands, that had sallied forth from Florence, adding: "Those troops yonder are marching out —with what intent, God knows—and in a short time you will know also—"

The artifice of Don Ferrante was altogether successful (as he had indeed guessed it would be); and a few minutes after, twelve companies of landsknechts with their captain at their head, descended the hill in close array, and came on at a quick pace, threatening the rear of the Italians, who were now tired, reduced in numbers, and their ranks disordered from the prolonged action in which they had been engaged, and also from their feeling secure with respect to the victory.

Fanfulla, who, to use his own expression, the night before in St. Mark's, when describing the character of veteran soldiers, had always one eye to the cat and another to the frying-pan, was the first to perceive this movement, and informed his comrades of it, who were quite at a loss in divining the object of the landsknechts. But a few shots discharged by them, and which wounded some few, soon relieved them of all doubt on this point; and the poor Italians, thus surrounded and exposed to be cut down, shouted: *Traitors! traitors!* but at the same time, they were obliged to think of effecting a retreat from their present position, in which they were assailed on all quarters, so that it was utterly impossible for them to make head against the foe. By a side movement, keeping in close ranks, and defending themselves both from the landsknechts on one side and the Spaniards on the other;—which latter, on the arrival of this unexpected aid, assumed the offensive once more;—they gradually approached the shores of the Arno, intending to attempt the fording of it close under Mount Olivet, and to take up a position on the opposite bank at Fesolé.

The stream, which at this season becomes low and shallow on one side of its bed, leaving the gravelly shore quite dry, was now considerably increased by the storm of the previous night, and was rushing turbid and swollen along, but yet not so deep, as entirely to preclude a passage, especially to such bold and hardy fellows; who, being overwhelmed by such disproportionate numbers, had no other way, by which to retreat.

Lambert, Fanfulla, and the captains who still remained, having quickly picked out the best men, drew them up, so as to sustain the shock of their assailants, and by that means give their comrades time to attempt the ford, and gain the opposite side in safety.

If the troops, which had come out of Florence by Malatesta's order, had been, instead, the succours that the Italians expected, the moment was now come to attack the landsknechts and Spaniards in the rear, and such a movement would probably have restored the battle and recovered the victory. But when they saw them keep their position, without moving, and without any sign of making an advance, Lambert and his companions began to despair; and while still continuing to fight on, they kept making signs, bidding the standard-bearer wave his flag, and shouting; "*On, Italy! on!*" till, on discovering that Cencio Guercio, a creature of Malatesta's, was at the head of these troops, they knew how matters stood, and were bereft of all further hope.

The stream of the Arno was now crowded with soldiers, who passed over, by sticking their pikes at the bottom, to keep themselves up against the force of the current; which, rushing along muddy and foaming, reached up to their breasts, and in many places as high as their neck, so that not a few were thrown down; some, with difficulty, supported themselves, and several were drowned; whilst a heavy shower of balls was all the time rattling down upon them. However, the greater part gained the opposite shore in safety; and the only persons now left on the other bank, were our brave friends, with the few who had remained with them to protect the passage of the river; and the vast body of the enemy would certainly have overwhelmed them, had they been less valiant than they were; or had not the Spaniards and the landsknechts, in great numbers, retired from the combat, in order to go and pillage the now empty tents of the Italians, which they sacked, burnt and destroyed with incredible fury and avidity.

Notwithstanding this however, those, in whom revenge was stronger than avarice, and the number of whom was far more than a match for the small band opposed to them, indignant that a handful of men should not only hold them in check, but even defy them with expressions of scorn and insult, rushed with renewed fury on these brave fellows; who, looking upon themselves as dead men, defended themselves like wild beasts at bay. At this moment, pierced by a spear, poor Vieri fell mortally wounded; Averardo, who was the only one of his brothers that was aware of it, rushed furiously at the man who had struck him down; but a shot, at that moment, caught him, which broke his right leg high up, and caused him to fall on his knees close to the body of his brother, and within a very short distance of the bank, which descended almost perpendicularly to the river. On finding his vengeance thus disappointed, his countenance, that was ferocious enough before, assumed an expression, quite terrific, gnashing his teeth, and flashing fire from his eyes: so that the slayer of Vieri stood with his sword raised aloft, as if spell-bound, without striking the intended blow; whilst Averardo, unable to get up to him, hurled his sword at him, the hilt of which striking him on the breast, made him quite stagger. But soon recovering himself, and seeing the rich armour of his antagonist, he thought, if he made him prisoner, he would probably obtain a splendid ransom. He came up therefore, fancying, that as he was now disarmed, he should be able to capture him without opposition. But scarcely was he within reach, when Averardo, by a powerful effort, raising himself up upon the leg that was unhurt, clutched his adversary tightly in his grasp; (and never did angry bear, when wrestling, ever so firmly plant his claws in his enemy's back); and dragging him along, still holding him with tenacious gripe, he let himself fall backwards, and rolled down into the stream below. The water parted, and splashing up in a thousand particles, soon met again and closed over those, whom it had received in its bosom; where, from the holes being rather deep, they were whirled about in the mud below. It was some moments before they reappeared; when they did, they were rolling one over the other, still tightly locked together; and after coming to the surface for a moment, they sunk again to the bottom, and were seen no more.

Lambert and Bindo, observing this action of Averardo's, and seeing Vieri lying dead upon the ground, uttered a furious cry, and were about to rush desperately into the thickest of the enemy, where they must certainly have fallen; for although by a miracle, neither of them had been seriously wounded, yet they were a good deal bruised, and their strength was now beginning to be exhausted, for they had been fighting for several hours under a burning sun, and their armour was become quite hot from its rays; but Fanfulla, who from long familiarity with such scenes, never lost his presence of mind, knowing that it was not the time to think of avenging the dead, but rather to bring off the living in safety, found means to extricate the two survivors from this desperate meleé. And seizing the moment, when the enemy, struck with astonishment at the bold and ferocious deed of Averardo, had paused for an instant, waiting to see how the matter would end, between the two men who had fallen into the river, he said hastily to Lambert: "Let us save Bindo, as there's nothing more to be done now; you on one side, and I on the other, let us convey him to the Arno, and pass over if possible."

Lambert, in whom the light of reason was darkened by the grief he felt at their lost cause, for the death of his two relatives, had determined not to survive; but, all at once, the thought of Niccolo and Laodamia recurred to his mind, and it seemed to him rather hard, that the poor old man should have to lose this lad too, without any benefit to the cause of his country; and therefore, no sooner said than done, taking Bindo by one arm, while Fanfulla held him by the other, they forced him, notwithstanding his resolute resistance, to leap into the river with them. It was high time indeed; for being left almost alone, every moment's delay was exposing them to certain death, or, at any rate, to the necessity of surrendering.

The Italians meanwhile, who had previously gained the opposite shore, and had re-formed their ranks, no sooner saw them fording the river, and therefore below the level of their shots, than they began to fire upon the enemy; by which means, as they were obliged to withdraw from the river's edge, our good friends had ample opportunity for rejoining their comrades in safety; who, after making a last discharge of all arms, moved off slowly and in good order, with drums beating and flags flying, so that they might not have the appearance of flight; and leaving the Arno behind them, they directed their march towards the hills of Fesolé. On reaching this point, they halted, as their position could not easily be forced; whilst the Spaniards and landsknechts, on their side, remained under arms, apprehensive that their foes, making better arrangements to ensure the success of their design, which for the present had miscarried, might renew the attack with better fortune. This fear on their part, rendering them submissive and obedient to their officers, was the salvation of Florence; and the death of so many, who, if they had lived, could have claimed their pay, brought no slight relief to the Apostolic Chamber; which obtained this rebatement on the price that Florence cost, thanks to the artful policy of Baccio Valori.

He, from one of the towers of the Bini mansion, which he had ascended with Troilus, Malatesta, and Nobili, had watched the whole transaction; and when he saw it turn out so exactly according to his wishes, he exclaimed in an ecstasy of delight, rubbing his hands, and at last breathing freely and easily: "Now indeed our business is finished! and we are masters of Florence!"

Nobili who, night and day, saw before his eyes, like visionary forms, Niccolo's chests full of florins and ducats, hereupon observed, with a glance of eager impatience, looking first at Baccio, and then at Troilus: "Oh! for the love of God, let us make haste, lest he should escape from our hands!"

"Ah! and lest my Laodamia should escape from mine," said Troilus, laughing; "that flower, that lily, that most divine and lovely creature!" He thought within himself, were Selvaggia here, she too would say, "And lest my Lambert escape me!"——He then added: "We certainly shall have nothing to quarrel about; as every one is satisfied with his share of the spoil."

The joy which Baccio felt, inspired him with such good humour, that in a jesting mood, taking hold of Troilus, he said:

"The rogue! to do one thing, he devises a hundred.—Let's hear all about it! What is this foolish fancy of thine, this Laodamia?—You told me something on't—methinks—but at that time I had other thoughts in my head.—Let's hear: come! Some love frolic, I suppose!"

Then knitting his brows, he added in a jesting tone:

"Art thou not ashamed—with a wife and child—eh?"

"Sir Baccio," replied Troilus, gently withdrawing himself from his hand: "I, you know, am just the reverse of this Florentine people: they are on the point of changing their government by many, into a form of government by one,—whilst I, from a state of one wife, am about to pass into one of many wives.—Why, it's all the influence of our stars!—And do you thank God, that I have taken this turn.—If it hadn't been for the hope of trapping this pretty little damsel—the fair *Maid of Florence*,—at last—you would have had to wait a long time, before you would have caught me leading the stupid life I have!"

"Well, well; but now tell us the history of it."

"Oh! that's soon told. I like her, because she is pretty; and pretty girls, you know, if I mistake not, are made for handsome young fellows. Hitherto there was no playing the fool, with Niccolo and all the tribe of them about me.—And, shall I tell you the truth?—I saw that it would be pains thrown away. Just fancy; one day, I offered to say a civil word or two, just by way of joke; nothing wrong, 'pon my honour! And she gave me such a look, and said to me, with those honied lips of hers: 'Such conduct is neither that of a Christian nor a gentleman!'—Patience! thought I; if this mode of wooing don't please you, we'll find another."

CHAPTER VI.

"And, pray, what may this other be?" asked Baccio, who was highly amused with Troilus's ribaldries, and with the saucy manner in which he related them.

"Well, this is it. But let me go back a little in the story. From the conversation I have heard in the house, I have gathered that Niccolo intends to fly to Genoa, to Andrea Doria; and to go by the way of Pistoia and the mountain district, sleeping at a farm of his near San Marcello. If you will listen to me, you will offer no obstacle to his departure; for as to attempting to lay a finger on him in Florence, I wouldn't swear there would not be an uproar among the people, if you did. You ought to have been last night at St. Mark's, and seen all those ragamuffin workpeople, how they offered to die for him!—Let him go, then; I too shall pretend to fly with him—and 'tis enough that you give me five or six soldiers, who will follow me at a distance, and these shall be accompanied by some one, that I know—and who may prove of service.—However, that'll be my business.

—These soldiers, though, will want a leader, and he must be a safe man"—

"I'll go!" exclaimed Nobili, who was afraid they would be playing him some trick or other.

Troilus surveyed him from head to foot, with a certain grin peculiar to him, and presently added:

"Well—you shall come—and the soldiers will then have to boast of having had an officer, that before they find such another . . . —Well, when we gain the mountain district, with the aid of the Panciatichan party, if our own men are not enough, we will bring them back quietly to Florence; or to speak more correctly, Signor Benedetto will, and they will dismount at the prison gate. I, when we are on the road to Prato, shall take the left hand with the fair Laodamia and a small company, and wend my way to Baccio Valori's castle to settle accounts with his steward, and taste his wine; and Sir Baccio will give me a letter, so that if I want bed and board for a day, they'll not come out with, they've not the keys, and so forth."

"And I'm to hold the ladder for you—eh—you rogue?"

"Why, you know, the other day when Benedetto was putting in a word for Niccolo's florins, and was almost shedding tears about them, what did I say? That I did not make my market for money, and that it was something else that I had my eye upon.—The truth is,—and this is the whole of my offence,—I do as the ancient Romans did, with those pretty Sabine lasses—they would not for love, wouldn't they? so they had them perforce." . . . . . .

. . . .

But if we should recount, even to the last syllable, the conversation of these wretches, have we any reason to suppose, that it would be acceptable to our reader, who probably understands enough already for the elucidation of our story? Let us leave them, then, to their schemes; as, please God, they will not all have the good fortune to chant the hymn of victory; and let us see what was going on, in the meanwhile, in Niccolo's house, to which he himself had now returned; and where he had already received the sad news of the defeat of the Italian bands.

Scarcely were the tidings announced to him by one, who, from the walls, had been a witness of the whole transaction, than he dismissed his daughters from his presence, who were standing around him, weeping and trembling. It was very reluctantly that they obeyed his command, which he repeated more than once; and even after he had closed the door, they remained listening, full of fears and apprehensions, and offering up prayers to heaven, to sustain the fortitude and patience of their unhappy father, at this trying moment. When left alone, he sank on his knees, at the niche appropated to the relics of Savonarola; but his strength being utterly prostrated, he fell forwards with his head to the ground, and his hands clasped in an attitude of fervent devotion. We deem it vain, to attempt to describe the condition of that desolate and lonely heart, which seemed at this moment to be abandoned alike by Heaven and earth (for, every now and then, even the light of faith seemed to waver); uttering doleful moans, and turning devoutly to request the intercession of the martyr, his master and friend, who, he felt certain, would hear him in heaven: "O holy father," he exclaimed, "thou when on earth didst love me—wherefore hast thou forsaken me? Oh! sustain and save my faith, and take away my life—let me die, O my God! let me die! I can bear it no longer—no longer—"

And then he remained, for a time, mute and motionless, crushed beneath the weight of his sorrow, which, from the very circumstance, that it was sufficient to darken and confound the perceptions of his mind, was, to a certain extent, its own remedy, by depriving his afflicted soul of its sensibility to suffering. But all at once, he roused himself from this lethargy, as he seemed to hear a superhuman voice, saying to him:—Who is this, that wishes for his reward before the sun is gone down, and the evening is come? Who is it, that asks for rest before the close of the day? Who told you, that you are useless to your country, and that it has no further need of your services? Did not your ancestors return, though so often expelled? Who ever despairs of his country, but the coward?—He raised his head, supporting himself on his knees, and at last rose up, quite changed from what he was a few minutes before; his austere spirit, like a strong and well-tempered steel spring, which too heavy a weight may bend, but cannot break, rose up again in all its native majesty, and he said: "Let us fly from Florence for the present, and let us go elsewhere, to aid in bringing about better days for it.—I indeed shall not see them, I shall die in a land of exile—but my children will see them—if I have any still left—my country will see them.—And could I, wretch that I am! wish to die?—After ninety years tha I have lived, should the day have ever come when I should rather think of myself than of my country?"—

At this moment he heard the sound of numerous footsteps in the adjoining room; he guessed, they were his sons returning from the battle; and thought to himself:—Dare I hope they will be all there?—And placing his hand on the key, he opened the door, and with a sorrowful countenance, but calm and resigned, he welcomed the young men. Perceiving that there were two of them missing, he stood for a moment, without saying a word, and then asked: "Can anything be done for them?—Can human aid avail them?"—

Lambert replied: "They are better able to do something for us—they are now in Paradise—to pray for us."—

Niccolo, in a low voice, said—*Amen*,—he then turned away his face, and was silent for some moments, during which, from the motion of his lips it could be perceived, that he was praying. At last he said: "I grieve not for their death, which they have met for their country's sake—but I do indeed grieve to think, that they have fallen in vain!—But Heaven has sat in judgment on Florence, and her iniquities have been found too many and too great!—But come, my children, the hour of exile has struck for us! Let us remember how many times our ancestors found themselves reduced to a like extremity; let us imitate their firmness, and their constancy; which enabled them, though living long years in exile from their native land, to effect their return, and to secure the triumph of liberty. Shall we show ourselvess less men than they were?—I have already spoken to you of my plan.—We will go to Genoa, to Signor Andrea—to the man who could subjugate his country, and yet leave it free, and in the enjoyment of independence. He will afford an asylum to all who suffer in the cause of liberty. Get ready whatever is necessary for your journey; at dead of night, we will leave this place; I, to return no more; you, to return, if God will, in happier days."

And looking round upon the walls and the furniture of the room, which he had occupied for fifty years and more, he said: "Farewell then for ever, my beloved home!—I had fondly hoped, that in this bed I should die in peace, in the midst of my children, and that my bones would have been gathered to the sepulchre of my fathers in the church of

St. Mark's!—But God's will be done!—wherever they lie, the sound of the last trumpet, at the great day, will reach even to them—and then, I shall meet with the reward of all my sufferings, provided I have known how to bear them with meekness and resignation."

While Niccolo was speaking, the young men and Fanfulla stood with downcast and sorrowful countenances. Laodamia, after bitterly weeping upon hearing of the death of her brothers, had gently whispered in Lambert's ear, to ask if he were wounded, or had met with any accident; but, by a shake of the head, (in order not to interrupt the old man) and with a fond look, he had eased her mind on that point; whilst Lisa, almost before they had entered, perceiving that Troilus was not with them, had made inquiries of Fanfulla respecting him, in the utmost alarm. He too, in an under tone, and in few words, reassured her as to his safety, telling her that he would be sure to be with them shortly. The two girls therefore went off, to attend to the preparations for their journey; for which, as it was now within a few hours of sunset, they had not much time to spare.

Fanfulla then gave an account of their meeting with the friar, in the morning, at the gate of St. George, as they were going out of the city, and of there being a price set upon Troilus's head; and he expressed some alarm at not finding him at home, as he thought some accident must have befallen him; and the good Niccolo, beginning to feel very much concerned for this traitor, for such he now believed him less than ever, was quite unhappy and disturbed; and wanted to know, whether they had not better send to look for him; but the question was, to whose house? and where? and then for persons, who were notorious Piagnoni, it was dangerous to be seen about in Florence just now; and for the uncertain good of a single individual, ought they to hazard the liberty, and perhaps the life, of the few who were left?

But to dispel all doubt and alarm, at that moment Troilus himself entered, just come from striking the bargain, by which he had sacrificed the life, the honour, and the property of Niccolo; and from concerting those final measures, which were to complete the ruin of that virtuous and unfortunate family.

The traitor, on entering, had artfully striven, as well as he could, to assume an appearance of melancholy and dejection; but a keen eye, and one that was not prepossessed in his favour, would readily have detected, beneath that hypocritical mask, the villainous and ill-repressed exultation, that every now and then gleamed in his eyes, as he fancied the moment was now arrived, when he was about to clutch his prize, and was feeding, in anticipation, on the thought of the honours, the rewards, and the varied and endless pleasures, with which he foresaw his future life would be surrounded; and as a first instalment, he reckoned on the acquisition of that fair and lovely girl, for whom he had so long pined in vain.

He was greeted by Niccolo with a cordial embrace,——nor did he himself want for assurance, to receive his welcome and to respond to it! And fully aware that he must give some explanation of the manner, in which he had passed the day, he said, forging a thousand lies, that he had strained every nerve to stir up the city bands; and gave an account of his exertions, and of the obstacles caused, at last, to his design, by the manœuvres of Malatesta to keep in check the Florentine soldiery; and when he had finished, deeply deploring and bewailing the general calamity, he said that he had come to live or die with Niccolo, and to do whatever it might still be in their power to do.

The good old man, who in consequence of the imposture about the price set on his head, regarded him as a martyr in the cause of liberty, and as one whose life was exposed to greater danger than that of any of the rest, told him, that after nightfall they would convey him, in the midst of them, safely out of Florence, and would defend him against any one, who ventured to attack him, even to the last drop of their blood; and embracing him with many endearing epithets, and bidding him take heart, he dismissed him with the rest, so that they might go and get ready, to mount at the appointed hour.

Whilst they were severally occupied throughout the house, in making their hasty preparations for this mournful journey, we will endeavour to descend into each of their hearts, with a view to discover, if possible, their inmost thoughts, and describe the distress and anguish of those last hours, which preceded their departure.

Niccolo, left alone, sat down to collect his thoughts, and rest for a moment; then, starting to his feet, with an air of stern resolution, he began to think, before all other matters, how to carry away with him the relics of Savonarola. Mounting, but with some difficulty, on a chair, he took down the tunic, and also the costly bag, which contained the ashes of the friar; and placing them, not without tears, in a little box, he said: "At least let me have these with me, wherever I die!" Then opening his journal which, on account of its being a bulky volume, he resolved to leave behind, together with many other household things, he wrote therein the following words:—

"This —— day of August, anno 1530: I, "Niccolo di ser Cione, at the age of ninety years, "three months and four days, was compelled "to quit my house and this city of Florence, "which had fallen into the hands of the Palleschi "and of His Holiness Clement VII., the enemies of "this republic; which defended itself bravely and "nobly to the last; but, having lost its liberty, may "its fame at least be commended to the keeping "of all honest men; and may it ever flourish and "abound. And may the Lord God have mercy "upon our sins. *Amen.*"

After this, collecting together several letters and papers, which he thought, if found by the new government, might be the cause of trouble to more than one citizen, he made a heap of them on the hearth, and set them on fire. While the flames were consuming them, he thought: In a few moments this blazing hearth shall burn no more, Niccolo!—And those who know the feeling, I might almost say, the religious feeling, that the paternal hearth awakes in the heart, will be at no loss to conceive, what must have been, at that moment, the feelings of the aged patriot.

From the fireplace he went to the bed; and taking down from one of the posts a silver crucifix, he kissed it, and then suspended it round his neck, by a chain that was attached to it. He himself had placed it between the cold and rigid hands of his dying wife; and he had taken it from them, before she was carried forth to be buried; so that it brought vividly to his recollection that beloved woman; who, firm yet humble, prudent yet at the same time ingenuous and innocent, had been the joy of his youth, and the pride and comfort of his old age; who had spent so many years with him unknown, so to speak, to all the world, except to his heart alone: that heart, that was intrepid and undaunted, but not stern or unfeeling; and at the moment of taking this last memorial of his departed wife, he felt it stirred with a thousand youthful remembrances, that he himself had thought, were obliterated for ever.

"Oh! how many sorrows did our heavenly Father spare thee, in calling thee to Himself, before these sad and miserable days!—the death of so many of thy sons!—the downfall of Florence —Lisa . . . . . . — and now exile—flight—hardships and sufferings—and death in a foreign land. O God! Thou wast merciful! I then wept—I bewailed my fate. Thou knewest what was best for me! Now I bless Thee, O God, that I suffer alone."

Presently, putting together several trifles for his own use, and having packed them in a travelling bag, he took out some money from a chest, which he kept laid up for any unforeseen emergencies, and which were the only treasures in money that he had; for as to those cellars full of gold, it was but one of the usual stories,. that, in every age and in every country, are current among the lower orders about people reputed to be rich. Rich indeed Niccolo might be called, but he was neither a miser, nor inclined to amass money merely for it to lie idle; but he put it out to interest, investing it in the banks of Venice, Lyons, Genoa, and the principal cities of Europe; so that, in his exile, whatever else he might have to fear, he would not have to fear poverty.

When he had finished his preparations, he sat down to rest; and raising his head, he perceived that the lamp that hung before the niche, now stripped and empty, was still burning. He once more got up, and blew it out. That apparently trivial act was a fresh and most acute source of pain to the poor old man, who ever since Savonarola's death, now thirty-two years ago, had constantly kept that light burning; he was wont to see it day and night, to turn towards it, when engaged in his devotions, and during the long and solitary watches, in which, owing to his old age, he frequently passed whole nights.——And now, his room without its usual light, seemed to him like a thing without life, quite changed, with the stillness and desolation of death about it. His thoughts recurred to his sons, who had been slain, with still more poignant anguish; for they had so often been with him in this very room, which now appeared to him so full of sorrowful associations, that he could bear them no longer; and he felt an indescribable eagerness and longing to quit it, and to escape, at once, from so many mournful recollections. And indeed, throughout the whole household, Niccolo was the most miserable of all, for he could discern in his future prospects, not a single ray of hope to comfort him.

Laodamia, on the contrary, while occupied in her room, attended by Mistress Fede, had her eyes indeed filled with tears and her heart oppressed with sorrow, at the recollection of the sad fate of her brothers, the miseries of her country, and the anguish of her father; and at seeing herself, all on a sudden, hurried away, to go and live among strange and distant people, far away from the home, around which centered the thoughts, the joys, and the affections of her whole life—but then there was Lambert, who would always be at her side, far removed from these horrid dangers; was not that an adequate compensation, a refuge, a hope? And while hope lasts, who can be utterly miserable?

Poor Lisa too, had at the same time a ray of hope, that helped to bear her up against her present misfortunes. She hoped, poor girl! to recover her husband's love (for the suspicion, the certainty almost, that she had lost it, was ever preying upon her heart, and slowly, but constantly, undermining her spirits) when she should be with him alone, in some distant part of the country, removed from the companions and associates, that had seduced him away from her; and when she should be living away from these scenes of danger, and these constant conflicts, peacefully and tranquilly, she thought she should then regain her health and beauty, fresh and comely, as it once was—and in the midst of all her woes, she conjured up, in her fertile imagination, a thousand visions of felicity. She pictured her husband to herself the object of the applause and admiration of all for his elegance and beauty; and his heart once more become her own again, as it once was, all confiding love and tenderness; and she dwelt with ecstacy, in her own mind, on this two-fold triumph, for the poor girl had no heart, no thought but for Troilus; and every day she felt her love grow stronger and stronger for this unworthy villain.

Meantime the sun had gone down, and the vesper bell was sounding from the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. Mona Fede entered Niccolo's room to bring a lighted taper, and said, as is the custom with servants in Italy, when at dusk they bring lights into their master's room: "A good evening!" This she did from mere habit, without reflecting, that at that moment such words were but a mockery. The old man smiled sorrowfully; and just then the young men, and the two girls entered with Fanfulla, who had vowed not to leave them, till they were all lodged in a place of safety.

Lambert said that everything was ready for their departure, and advised them to hasten the time of it, before the night was further advanced, in order to avoid the risk of being stopped at the gate; for an hour after dark there was great difficulty in getting out. There were already two mules at the gate, on which the baggage was being placed; and Lambert's servant, aided by Fede, had just carried out Niccolo's luggage.

The preparations for this departure could not, it may readily be imagined, be carried on so secretly, as to escape the observation of the neighbourhood; and the rumour having already got abroad among the lower orders, among whom were many workmen in Niccolo's employ, and not a few of those who, on the night before, had offered their services to Niccolo in St. Mark's, they began to collect, and to form knots of talkers, recalling, how they had sworn to defend him, and resolving among themselves, not to let him set out on his journey, at a time of such danger, without their accompanying him.

These poor men had soon settled it among themselves, and sent Bozza to Niccolo's house, to get secretly informed, by what gate Niccolo purposed to leave the city; and having learnt from one of the guides, that he was going by the road to Pistoia, they divided into two bodies; and many went out (one by one however) by the gate al Prato, appointing to meet in a field, at the side of the road near San Donato; and the rest distributed themselves around the house, in the street De Conti, and at other points, in order to form a guard, and be ready, in case an attempt were made from any quarter, to interrupt or impede his departure.

Troilus, from a window, watched this assemblage of people, and said to himself: "There, see, whether I was right in thinking, that to attempt to make a prisoner of this old fellow in Florence, was a desperate venture!"

At last, the time came; the horses were ready, and their baggage already sent forward; and during the last moments, whilst the assembled family were standing all silent and dejected, there was heard in the upper stories of the house a dull and heavy sound, which proceeded from the shutting of the doors, the drawing of bolts and bars, which were everywhere being made fast; and this noise came nearer and nearer, accordingly as Mistress Fede came lower down, closing the shutters, and examining in every direction, to see whether she had left anything not attended to, any entrance for thieves unguarded, and thinking even about the rain in case of storms; and at last, she said, half in tears: "All this trouble! all these precautions! and after all, God only knows into what hands this poor house may fall! Something worse than thieves, I fear me!—Holy Virgin, help us!" And so, having finished these arrangements, she came into Niccolo's room, and remained standing by the door-post, as if wishing to let him understand, that she had now attended to everything, and that as far as she was concerned, all was ready, but without having the heart to say so in words; for she could not, so to say, give the signal for them to depart.

The old man, meantime, seemed disturbed by a fresh subject of disquietude, and at last he said, that he had sent, by one of the stable boys, a letter to Father Zaccaria at St. Mark's, to offer him to accompany them in their departure from Florence, and directing him to propose to Fojano the same opportunity of escape; for both of them, by their preaching during the siege in favour of resistance, were now exposed to the most imminent danger.

"I cannot bring myself to set out, before I know whether we can be of any service to these two good friars."

Fanfulla, without opposing this generous resolution, showed however in his looks, and by a certain restless manner, that he did not approve, at such a time, of longer delay; and Lambert, who was of the same opinion, proposed that Fanfulla should in the meantime go forward to the gate, and confer with the captain of the guard, and so arrange matters, that he should offer no opposition to their passing; and Niccolo gave him fifty ducats, with which to ensure the success of his application.

A moment or two after Fanfulla had started with this object, the answer from St. Mark's at last arrived.—Father Benedict wrote to say, that the two friars were already out of the reach of danger (so he thought; but Fojano had been taken prisoner, as he was leaving Florence in disguise), and that he trusted God would in like manner conduct Niccolo and his family to a place of safety. The latter, now breathing more freely, exclaimed, as he rose up with a readiness, that it was easy to see was not natural to him: "Now then let us go—and may God who sees our condition, be our helper and protector—My children, (he said, stopping all on a sudden) you will one day return to this house, to this room, without me; when you do, recollect your poor old father Niccolo, and his advice to you. If you have any power or authority in Florence, trust neither nobles, nor hired soldiers or captains—for it is owing to them, that we this day have to quit our native land."

And then casting one last look around, he added in a voice, and with a countenance, apparently calm and unmoved: "Let us go—"

Thus they all at length began to go, the men silent and thoughtful, the females dissolved in tears; and proceeding to the gate, they one after another mounted on horseback, and set out in the following order: Niccolo went first, with Bindo on one side and Fanfulla on the other; Lambert followed by the side of Laodamia; then Troilus with Lisa, who carried her child in her arms; and Mona Fede and Maurice brought up the rear.

Whilst Niccolo, not without some trouble, was mounting, there flocked round him a considerable number of the people, who were waiting about in the neighbourhood; and one held his stirrup, another attempted to help him to rise up, to get into the saddle; some with tears embraced his knees or kissed his feet, uttering words of deep and affectionate devotedness, blessing him, and bidding him to be of good cheer; whilst Bozza, placing one hand on the horse, and with the other vehemently gesticulating, exclaimed: "Don't fear, Sir Niccolo, for we are by you, and you shall escape in spite of all those traitorous villains!"

The old man responding by signs, and with many a kindly word, to these displays of feeling, they proceeded on their way, and on arriving at the gate al Prato, they found that Fanfulla had, without much trouble, secured a free passage; and they passed through without any interruption, together with several of these operatives, thanking God that they had met with nothing to stop them. They little thought that this circumstance was in consequence of Baccio's express orders, who wisely enough followed Troilus's advice on this occasion.

When they had passed through the gate, they took the road that leads to Prato; the heaven was now all spangled with stars; and it was only in the eastern sky, behind the dark and undulating masses of mountain, that a streak of orange-coloured light was visible; over which rested long lines of dark clouds, just tinged, here and there, upon their extreme edges towards the horizon, with a faint and ruddy light.

The mournful cavalcade, some on foot, and some on horseback, moved along without uttering a word, and causing no other sound, but that of the step of the pedestrians and the trampling of the horses. The surrounding landscape, all dark and still, infused into their hearts a peaceful feeling, that was at once grateful and sad; the shrill and feeble chirp of the grasshoppers smote upon their ears, at certain regular intervals, and the infinitely varied sounds of those innumerable species of insects, that give life to the silence of night, without disturbing it. The calm tranquillity of nature, contrasted, only too powerfully, with the agitations and emotions of these poor distressed people.—And who, when suffering under calamity, that finds himself by chance in some pleasant rural scene, and sees the lovely morning, or the setting sun, and the serene and tranquil night, but has felt a sense of melancholy and depression, as if all this scene of peace and loveliness but mocked his misery?—Perhaps the reason is, that the perpetual and unchanging order of nature, when contrasted with the constant mutations of our ever-shifting condition, is calculated to humble us, by reminding us of our own feebleness and insignificance.

After proceeding some little distance, they gained a slight eminence, from whence they could still distinguish the spires and towers of Florence. Here Niccolo drew up, and turning round, he succeeded in catching (what he thought would be) a last glimpse of the dark and massive dome of the cathedral. He extended his arms towards it, as if to bid it farewell, and uttering a deep sigh, but, without saying a word, or any of his attendants venturing to speak to him, he put spurs to his horse, and resumed his journey.

The company of workmen, who were waiting for him at San Donato, had, in the meantime, joined them, but without any commotion, or even so much as a word passing; and these poor people, thinking themselves happy in the opportunity of defending Niccolo, and conducting him on his road in safety, walked along at a good pace, indifferent to fatigue, or danger; till, after travelling about two hours, they arrived at Prato. Having made a circuit of the walls, and regained the high road to Pistoia, Niccolo wanted to halt, to give those who were on foot, time to rest and refresh themselves; but they would not hear of it, and coming round him in considerable numbers, they entreated him to continue his journey (for every stoppage might be attended with danger) assuring him, they were not at all tired; and indeed, they were not men who would easily have sunk under fatigue.

Journeying on therefore during the whole of the night, they found themselves towards day-break, not far from the gates of Pistoia; and now it was absolutely necessary to give time, both to man and beast, for rest and refreshment. Turning to the right, by a certain footpath, they reached a point beyond the city, towards the mountains, on the Modena road; where in the fields, they found a retired spot by the side of a hill, well sheltered by bushes and thick groups of chestnut-trees; here they halted, just about the time when it became quite light, and having all dismounted, Fanfulla and the young men quickly spread their cloaks and other clothes on the ground, so as to form a kind of couch for the old man and his daughters. Here they rested all that day, and having recruited their strength as well as they could, Niccolo thought it best to resume their journey towards evening. Before setting out, however, summoning around him those, who had thus far so kindly acted as guides and protectors to him, and of whom not a few were bent on continuing the journey with him, he said to them:—

"My children, it is now time for us to separate. What can I say to you, but to thank you, and to tell you, that I bear the remembrance of you with me in my heart, and that never, during the few remaining days of my life, shall I forget your kindness, and the love and devotion you have shown towards me? If it is true, that an old man's blessing is ratified on high, I now give you mine from the bottom of my heart! I, who am now nothing but a poor old man, cannot requite you in any other way:—return then to your homes—to your beloved and adored country, which I shall see no more; but which you will, I feel sure, one day see free and happy again.—At evening, when you perform your devotions with your children, pray also for Niccolo; pray for my sons who have fallen in this siege.—I shall lie beneath the green turf, in a distant land—but my memory will be preserved by you, it will survive in my native land, for which I have not been counted worthy to die. —This is my last request, this the last hope that I have now left.—And may God bless you all; and now, farewell for ever—"

These words were uttered by Niccolo in a voice, trembling with emotion, when he was already mounted, with the rest of his train. When he had finished, he let go his bridle, and turning to take a last look of those, they were about to leave behind, who, motionless and absorbed, kept their eyes fixed on him in a sort of stupor, he raised his hand, as if to bid adieu, or perhaps, he was pointing to heaven; and then taking his way through the trees, he was presently out of sight.

Regaining the high road, they now began to ascend, until having passed the summit of the hill, they found themselves in the valley del Reno; from which, after a short distance, turning to the left, and gaining the heights of Oppio, the beautiful valley opened before them, in which lie San Marcello and Gavinana, and which may be called the heart of the mountain district of Pistoia.

The visitor in these days to this tract of country, finds there nothing but the lovely scenery, the tranquillity, wealth, and elegant refinement of the inhabitants. Time, that impairs most things, ameliorates some; and here it has entirely extinguished the ancient rage of party feelings, and effaced even the memory of them. The arms and limbs that are not needed for the tillage of the soil, now find employment in the paper-mills, that have been established by a family, whose name recals that of one of the first in Italian literature, and who employ their riches in the noblest, because in the most useful way, to mankind. This occupation and their various businesses, render these people industrious and rich, and therefore peaceful and happy.

Very different was the state of things at the period of our story; nor will the reader have forgotten the sad and cruel retaliations of San Marcello, nor the furious animosities of the Cancellieri. After that event and the defeat of Ferruccio, the several parties and their various fortunes underwent a change, and with the same, or rather greater rage and fury, the Panciatichi had overpowered, pursued, and exterminated their enemies, demolishing and burning even their houses and their harvests; and our travellers, though it was night, soon discovered traces of this devastation.

Here, were vines torn up by the roots, fruit-trees hurled down, or sawn off at the stump; there, a field that had been set on fire, black and scorched, and bestrewed with ashes; here, a cottage that had been gutted by the flames, and of which nothing remained but the four walls; there, a house of some wealthier person, that had been pillaged by the soldiery, quite a ruin, its doors battered down or dragged off their hinges, the windows smashed, the shutters and window-frames wrenched away and hanging from the wall, where there was any part of them left, which in some cases there was not; all in fact was one scene of desolation and silence, and not a soul left of its former inhabitants; who, God alone knew, what end they had met with; whether they had been killed, whether they had effected their escape, whether they had been burnt alive and buried beneath the ruins by accident, or purposely shut in, that they might experience the horrors of a prolonged death. Lambert recognised the various spots, and the houses which, a few days before, he had noticed as he passed, all standing and in good condition, and said to Niccolo: "See here, San Marcello is avenged! The vengeance did not tarry long."

As he was saying this, they passed in front of a cottage that was more shattered and ruined than any they had seen, and in many places demolished, so that the bricks, the beams, and the rubbish, were strewn in the middle of the road; as they were passing, they heard, proceeding from a cellar, the feeble and moaning cry of a man's voice, imploring pity, for the love of God! They all stopped at once. Fanfulla, Lambert, and Bindo, dismounted, and searching about among the ruins, and frequently calling out, that they might be directed by the unhappy sufferer, they still heard nothing, but that same feeble and exhausted cry; but while Niccolo and the females were waiting in eager expectation, they at last caught sight of a human form, who, scarce able to crawl, dragged himself out of a hole, and said in a tone of voice, that made their flesh creep upon their bones: "Oh, yes, kill me! for I can bear these tortures no longer; but first of all a drop of water, for God's sake!—Oh, a little cold water, and then let me die!——"

They took the miserable creature by the arms, and carried him out into the road; whilst Bindo ran to the stream of Limestra, which was close at hand, and returned with some water, which the sufferer drank with avidity; then letting the vessel fall from his hand, he raised his head as well as he could, and said by way of thanks: "Now, I fear you no more; kill me, and you will do me a service—and a curse upon you, with all the party of the Panciatichi!"

At this Lambert, recalling his face, exclaimed: "Why, you are Captain Melocchi!—How is it you are here?"

"Ah," replied the dying man (for such he might now be called), "I had mistaken you; I thought you were a company of Panciatichi.—My family," he continued, with all the ferocity he could give expression to, in his present weak condition, "the party of the Cancellieri, are utterly destroyed—I, wounded, bruised, and mutilated, as you see me, have been living these last four days in concealment here—at one time the torture of my wounds!—thirst:——I have said over and over again, let them kill me,—but water! Ah, those dogs have not had the pleasure of seeing the Bravetto die!" He smiled, and the pain of his torment increased. "Oh—if he's alive, my cousin—Giovanni—tell him, it was Piero who gave me——And—let him remember——"

At this point, they could no longer understand what he said; he seemed, however, to be muttering the words, "*to kill him,*" which expired on his lips, together with his life.

They dragged the body on one side, that it might not be trampled on by the mules and horses that passed. And the party then pursued their way with feelings of sadness, as may well be imagined, from the miserable and wretched spectacle they had just witnessed, and Lambert said: "Thou deservedst no better death than this!"

And Niccolo rejoined: "God have mercy, if it may be so, upon that wretched maniac!"

Neither Lambert nor anybody else knew this Giovanni mentioned by Melocchi; but had they, they would have been little inclined, it may well be supposed, to execute his unhallowed commission.

CHAPTER VII.

It was close upon midnight when the cavalcade arrived at last at Gavinana, and went to the house, which Niccolo had made over to Lambert in the nuptial contract, and at which, an hour before, one of the guides who accompanied them had arrived, having ridden forward for the purpose of awaking the steward, and getting the door open, and everything that was requisite, ready against their arrival.

This worthy steward, who was nothing more than a labourer, was an old and faithful servant of Niccolo's family, in whose service he had been ever since he was a boy. Siding, as was natural, with the Cancellieran party, he had been, during the war, annoyed in various ways, by the opposite party; and only just saving himself as he best could, he lived in continual fear; so that it was some time before he would answer; and then, before he could be persuaded that his master actually was coming, so as to be prevailed upon to open the door, apprehending some trick or other, to gain an entrance into the house with the object of robbing it. At last, being convinced, he opened the door, and with the utmost despatch set about preparing one thing, and arranging another, aided by his wife and a lad, who was more than half asleep; until at last he heard the trampling of the horses' feet, and, running down stairs, found the travellers dismounting in a small courtyard between the house and the road, from which it was separated only by a low wall.

That smiling and officious eagerness, which is depicted on every steward's face, when in the act of welcoming his master on his arrival was, in the case of Matteo (for that was his name), replaced by an expression of deep sorrow. Niccolo, without exchanging many words with him, went at once with his party into a small ground-floor room, in which lights had been placed, and which, in spite of the steward's active preparations, retained evident traces of recent disorder. In addition to the damp, earthy smell, peculiar to rooms that are kept shut up and but little used, there was a strong odour of wine; on the ground were marks of different liquids that had been spilt, fragments of kitchen utensils, which the worthy Matteo, thus taken by surprise, had not had time to sweep up; and on the wall, where in the middle was a rude representation of the arms of Florence—a white shield with a crimson lily—you might see coarsely sketched, with a piece of burnt wood, a gallows, in such a way that the shield occupied the position of the suspended malefactor. Above it, in the form of an executioner, was represented a man with an imperial crown on his head; and by his side, on the ladder, where the priest usually stands that attends the condemned prisoner, was another figure, which, from his triple crown, was evidently intended for the Pope; so that the ingenious artist had designed to draw the Emperor Charles V. and Pope Clement VII., who together accomplished the ruin of Florence; and in this work, the excellence of the performance corresponded entirely to the grandeur of the conception. The walls all round were, in like manner, disfigured by sentences, written with firebrands, in elegant style, and with the choicest orthography; such as—"The Meddici fore evver!" "Deth to the lyun of Florrence!" etc. etc.

While his aged master, observing these insulting inscriptions, was eying them with a visible alteration of countenance, the steward said, almost in tears, and in a state of trepidation:

"You see, sir, how those villains have served your house?—That I'm alive, is quite a miracle—for we have seen strange things of late!—I verily thought the world was coming to an end!—First, there was the defeat of Ferruccio, when the shots came pouring down hereabouts, like hail,—then, those traitorous Panciatichi finished matters up. There's not a house in Gavinana, that has not some loss to deplore—with so many poor souls dead or wounded.—Why, I do believe there are not a hundred persons left in the place: some fled away, some dead; and those who remain, live in fear of a still worse fate. I refused to fly—it is in truth my bounden duty to guard your property; and they have taken up their quarters here to make merry, and have entirely consumed every blessed thing in the house—and then, when drunk as swine, they were not sparing of their blows and thumps to me and my poor Kate, I can tell you; and then all these ribald jests on the walls—And what do you think, they said to me?—When we come back here, if we find you have touched a single mark on this wall, we'll string you up by the neck, in the place of that shield yonder.—And therefore, I, poor soul, did not dare to clean it."

"Well, if you did not, I will," said Bindo, seizing hold of a broom that stood in a corner, and preparing to rub out those miserable caricatures; but Niccolo stopped him, observing:—

"We, my Bindo, are going to leave this place, but this good man remains behind; who is there to defend him, if these bandits should come and wreak their cruelty on him?—These insults are the lot of the vanquished—this is now our meat and drink;—if we had no mind to endure them, we ought to have had the spirit to conquer—but we have not."

The steward thanked Niccolo by his looks, and God knows with a sincere heart; for the seeing Bindo with his broom raised aloft, and the having the noose placed round his neck, seemed to him much the same thing.

In the meantime, Catherine appeared with some scanty preparations for supper; and if any body had not known, that the house had been sacked from top to bottom, he might have guessed it, on seeing the repast, the whole of which consisted of a salad, a small piece of cheese, and two rye loaves, one of which was not a whole one. The poor woman, with dejected and haggard countenance, her eyes swollen and red, laid the table, without saying a word, and every now and then heaved a deep sigh;—indeed, after the first few brief words, no one opened their lips again, but all remained deep in thought, sitting on a bench, that ran round the room fastened to the side of the wall; and this silence appeared still more gloomy, as not a voice, not a sound was heard without, although they were in the very centre of the town, not far from the great square. The crowing of a cock, or the baying of a dog would, at all events, have given some signs of life: but that desolate town presented altogether the appearance of a cemetery; and this resemblance became still more striking, as the wind, that blew in at the open windows, bore along with it the smell of a charnel-house; of which Matteo gave the following explanation:

"After the battle, there were in the great square, more than 1200 dead bodies; to save the trouble of carrying them outside the town, they buried them where they were—but to expedite the matter, they did not cast above three inches of earth over them—Heaven grant that those who lie dead, may not cause the death of the few who are left alive; and that the plague may not break out amongst us!"

"And amongst these," asked Niccolo eagerly, "was the great Ferruccio ignobly confounded?"

"No, sir, he was buried by himself under the water-pipe, at the corner of the church."

"Couldst thou show me the spot?"

"I can, whenever you like; for I too was sent along with a body of pioneers, and helped to dig his grave."

"Lead me thither at once. Come, my children, let us go and pay this slight honour to the greatest man, that Florence ever gave birth to."

The old man, hastily rising up, without any appearance of fatigue, went out with Lambert and the rest. The two girls also, although not invited to accompany them, on account of the fatigues they had undergone, were desirous of going to kneel at his honoured grave. Matteo led the way through the narrow street, with a lantern, by the feeble and uncertain light of which, they could see that several houses, indeed almost all, were standing open, and quite deserted by their inmates; the doors, too, of some had been forced off, and were lying on the ground by the side of the walls. Fanfulla exclaimed all at once, as he recognised the spot: "Here I got that scratch on my ear; and in this confined space, to see what a dance we had that day!—And just here, you know, the commissary with his file of officers rushed headlong into the midst of the landsknechts!"

Niccolo, drinking in with avidity the remarks of Fanfulla, was never tired of asking him all the particulars, not so much of the action, as of Ferruccio; for just at that moment they had emerged on the public square, and found themselves on the very spot of his most wonderful feats of heroism. They lingered here for a considerable time, in spite of the noisome exhalations, which here, more than anywhere else, tainted the air; and then proceeded across the square to go to the church. As they went along they felt the earth quite loose, and sometimes their feet sunk down slightly;—the girls shuddered, as they thought what they might be treading on.

Matteo, at last, stopped close by the side of the ancient church, and said, as he placed his lantern on the ground: "Here was laid that brave and valiant knight."

On the turf was plainly distinguishable a long and widish space, about the size of a man of tall stature, where the earth seemed to have been disturbed very lately, and from the impressions, still visible, of the soles of shoes, and of naked feet, it was evident that they had well pressed the soil down.

Niccolo, on seeing before him the ground, still soaked with the blood of his friend,—of the man who had been, in his eyes, the very model, the most exalted specimen of all that the world could offer, of virtue and of greatness, fell on his knees by the side of his grave, whilst a violent trembling seized him from head to foot; bending his head down, he kissed the moist sod, and with his forehead touching the ground, he remained some time in that posture, without moving; all those who were with him doing so too. The poor old man was heard to sigh and moan, and at last burst into tears. Presently, becoming somewhat calmer, he raised his eyes to heaven, and said: "Oh! if from those holy and blessed regions, where that mighty soul is now all a glorious spirit, it disdains not to cast a glance down upon this dark world, perhaps it now sees my tears—sees, that from that city, for which he shed his blood even to the last drop, we are come, we exiles, to render him this last honour; the only one in our power in this our present misery.—Ferruccio, Ferruccio! is this then to be thy sepulchre? And are the Medici, their country's parricides, to have honourable tombs in San Lorenzo? Will they not blush to leave thee here? Will they not place, at least, a cross over thy bones? a stone to tell—*Here lies Ferruccio?*——"

So spoke Niccolo; and time has shown whether he had a just idea of Medicean generosity, which left the bones of Ferruccio to rot where they were; which placed neither cross nor stone over them, and has not to this day; so that tradition has not even preserved the memory of the precise spot, where lies the best and bravest of the Tuscans. But this is said only in passing, and may these words reach those whom they concern.*

Then all at once regretting having entertained such a desire, he added, as if by way of reproof to himself: "But what am I saying? Am I beside myself? As if thou hadst need of such honours! —Let them keep them to themselves—let them reserve them for their own vile dust, which, however overlaid with marble, the vengeance of God will find out at the great day of account! And do thou, if thou canst hear me, thou noble spirit, accept this our lowly homage, and be assured, that it is more than the tombs of thy enemies and ours, will ever be able to boast of!—Be assured, that while the world lasts, the dust of this humble grave will be more honoured by hearts truly noble, than will ever the proud and boastful splendour of their costly sepulchres!—Be assured that that ignominy, which they may think to cast on thee, in this obscure and unhonoured spot, will turn to their own lasting infamy in future ages;—for to escape infamy, tyrants have not yet, Heaven be praised, found out the means!"

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* Since these pages were written, a humble stone has been erected to mark the spot where Ferruccio fell.

Whilst Niccolo, with fiery energy, and his passions roused almost to inspiration, was uttering these words, and to which those about him were listening, in reverent attitude, on their bended knees, and with their attention entirely riveted on his lips, there approached from beneath the church porch, six soldiers with drawn swords, followed by probably about fifty countrymen, armed with pikes, bills, and sticks, and before they, who were thus taken by surprise, could be aware of it, they found themselves on the ground, beneath a crowd of men, with the points of their swords or pikes directed to their face, or held to their throat and breast. In this way they were kept down by a score of hands, and pressed beneath the knees and feet of numbers; and a voice was heard proceeding from the midst of their assailants, and calling aloud: "Whoever moves is a dead man. You are the prisoners of the pope!"

These ruffians had, at the first onset, violently taken away their swords and other arms from the young men, who certainly would not have been wanting, either in courage or inclination, to defend Niccolo, though with the certainty of being cut to pieces; but the suddenness with which they were assailed, had deprived them of the power, so much as to move a finger; much less had they the free use of their limbs and weapons.

The females at first uttered shrieks of terror, which were soon stifled by the rude hands of those who had hold of them, no less than repressed by the vilest threats; and before a single one of these knaves would trust himself to rise from off the men, whom he was helping to keep down, others thrusting themselves between that coil of legs and arms, had first bound the prisoners with ropes, which they had brought with them for that purpose; and so tightly, that it was pretty plain what sort of men they thought they had to deal with; when they had bound them, they let them get up.

Who could describe the indignation, the bewilderment, the terror of these poor persecuted people, when they found themselves, so contrary to all expectation, fallen into the power of their enemies, just at the moment, when they thought their escape most certain ?

Lambert and Bindo, with their eyes downcast and turning in every direction, their breasts swelling and heaving with impotent fury, resembled two wild beasts caught in a snare. Maurice, who had followed his master to this spot, and was taken with the rest, was growling out curses in his native German. Fanfulla, who was always the same, and never laid aside his strange and careless humour, shaking his head, and fetching a deep breath, said, with a kind of half smile: " Well, this is a pretty business ! "

The girls were weeping, as they stood at a little distance, held by the arm by two of these wild-looking fellows. And Niccolo, standing erect and confident with his majestic and venerable countenance, said: " I know what it implies, my being a prisoner of the pope's."—And a bitter and disdainful smile curled his lip, as if to say;—Little is it, that he can take from me now!—Then turning to his sons, and pointing with his finger to Ferruccio's grave, he added: " From him I have learnt how to die—but perhaps, I had no need of that."

The old man was well aware, that it was his death that was desired, and not that of his sons or of any of the others; and therefore he was very little troubled; but at that moment, Troilus came into his mind, and the price that was placed on his head, as he believed; and regarding him as utterly undone, he was sorely distressed. He looked round, anxiously searching for him, and repeating the words: "I grieve for thee, Troilus, my son!" And as there was no other light than the lantern that Matteo had brought, and therefore they could not see very well, he had some difficulty in distinguishing him; till at last, he observed him at some distance, standing up, quite still, with his arms folded, and his eyes bent towards the ground; but he noticed, that he was neither bound, nor guarded by any of the soldiers, who had been so careful to prevent any of the rest from escaping.

The young man's countenance, which nature had formed after a model of perfect beauty, was at that moment blanched with fear, and looked as vile and abject, as his own treachery. Like Cain, and Judas, and other monsters of wickedness, he began to feel that worst of torments, the stings of remorse, unalleviated by a single gleam of hope or of penitence. Niccolo read his crime inscribed on his forehead, and observed on the countenances of the soldiers a smile of derision, which seemed to say:—You need not trouble yourself about him!—The veil was rent away, that had so long concealed from him the true state of the case, but which was now revealed to him, at last, in all its naked and tremendous reality. He raised his arms, and extended his hands, bound as they were at the wrist by a rough cord, and in a voice, that seemed to rive the hearts even of the hardened wretches, who surrounded him, he exclaimed, as he fixed his eyes on Troilus: "He was after all a traitor, then!—"

In the very sound of the words, in the very tone in which they were uttered, and in the attitude of the wretched old man, there was such an evident, such a heart-rending, conviction of the truth, which had just flashed across his mind, that even in the hearts, I repeat, of those hardened and ferocious ruffians there arose a feeling of pity.—But poor Lisa, just as if a red-hot iron had been thrust into her flesh, sprung from the grasp of the men who were holding her, with that nervous and convulsive force imparted by a feeling of distraction, and rushing towards her father, exclaimed: "Why—traitor? how?—Who can say my Troilus is a traitor?—What has he done?—"

And being prevented from going to look for him,—for she was soon again in the hands of those, from whom she had escaped, she kept bending forward with her head, and straining her eyes to find her husband, still repeating the words: "And a traitor too!—my Troilus a traitor!—O father dear! why utter such horrible words?—and at such a time too?"—

At last she too caught sight of him, standing still, at the same spot, with the same expression of countenance, and in the same attitude; and a similar impression to Niccolo's, a similar thought, or rather the truth itself flashed across Lisa's mind also; and she felt a cold chill run through her veins, at the sight of that degraded looking face, that made her turn away, and place her hand before her eyes. But, notwithstanding, soon getting the better of this first impression, and yielding once more to hope, she said to him with tears in her eyes, and only venturing to look at him from time to time, by stealth: "Oh, Troilus!—come—pray do, and say something—you heard surely—didn't you?—O why do you stand there in that way?—what mystery is there in all this?—O Troilus, Troilus! is it possible, that your poor, broken-hearted Lisa cannot obtain a word from you?—"

At last with a burst of unutterable distraction she exclaimed:

"Well, then, unfeeling man! say, at all events, that it is true!—that you are a traitor!—I shall, at least, be relieved from this wretched suspense!"—

The only reply she got, was a shrug of the shoulders from Troilus, who moved off, and was soon lost to view amid the shades of night.

Lisa became as pale and cold as a marble monument; her arms sunk down at her side, and she repeated the words:

"He was a traitor, then!"—and sinking down, as if dead, at Niccolo's feet, with her head touching the ground, she said in a low, feeble voice: "And I, wretched girl that I am, am the cause of all!"

"It is too true!" replied her father; and the soldiers, to whom it was now becoming almost too painful to be witnesses of such a scene, proceeded to convey their prisoners to the house, which they had only quitted a short time before.—

As they were going along, Maurice, who was walking by the side of Lambert, said to him, in a low voice, with something of a sigh:

"Remember that evening! I sait, me no trink! Not trink fine with Messer Droile!—He is a draitor!—Vas I right, poor Maurice?"

Lambert replied: "Only too much so!"

Upon being brought back to the house, Niccolo was placed in one room, the girls in another, and the men in a third, carefully guarded by several soldiers, till the hour appointed for their all setting out on the road back to Florence.

The blow was struck: Niccolo was a prisoner; and the captain of this noble enterprise, Benedetto de Nobili, who, concealed behind the backs of the men under his command, was the person who had called out: You are the Pope's prisoners!—why did he not come forward? why didn't he show himself? Because the base coward had not the courage to encounter the glance of Niccolo's eye, just as Troilus had not. Heaven be praised, that before honest men, the face of wretches, who have sold themselves to the powerful must ever, while the world lasts, be humbled to the dust!

Now that the prisoners were shut up and well guarded, so that there was no longer any risk of encountering them, the two traitors came into the house. With them was Selvaggia, to whom our heart will not allow us to affix the same epithet, since her conduct has not, in any respect, corresponded with her real feelings. And besides, what cannot be pardoned to a love like that which consumed her, and which ought rather to be called madness, distraction or frenzy? Much more, if we call to mind her long and hopeless sufferings, the scorn and contempt, the outrages and insults, which had been her only meat and drink (if we may be allowed the expression) ever since she first opened her eyes to the light, and her heart to the sympathies of human affection? Such souls as hers, especially, on coming into the world, bring with them the seeds of heroical virtues and tremendous crimes; circumstances, the society into which they are thrown, and the accidents of life, develop the one or the other; thence comes vice or virtue, good or evil, happiness or misery.

We know what had fallen to Selvaggia's lot; we know, that after draining the cup of misery to the dregs, she must have died the victim of wretchedness, had not a powerful hope sustained her alive, that of revenge. For this alone she clung to life; for this, she thought, she toiled, she laboured, she journeyed, ever since that terrible night, when, on the road to Empoli, she saw Lambert for the last time. It was for this she panted and plotted in the secret recesses of her heart, in the silence of her sleepless nights, in the long hours she spent, whether in the stillness of retirement, or in the bustle of the world; in crowds or in solitude, she was ever alone with that one constant and unvarying thought, irradiating her mind, like a murky star in a universe of darkness.

She longed for revenge, poor girl! and she had brooded over it long and deeply, and then fixed upon such a revenge, as was seldom or ever imagined by a human heart. She had, so to say, nursed it, and brought it up amid a thousand cares and difficulties, and was now about to see her darling object realized and fulfilled. The moment was now come.—

Around the table, on which still lay the untouched supper, that had been provided for the unhappy captives, sat Benedetto, Troilus, and Selvaggia. The first of these, in order to guard himself as securely as possible from the dangers, which he might probably have had to encounter on his late enterprise, was clad in a complete suit of mail, with breast-plate and habergeon; which, over the shoulders and under the arm-pits, by dint of good straps fitted tolerably well; but downwards, where the stomach was two yards in circumference, it would have been vain to have attempted to encase it, within the limits of his armour; so that the ends, not meeting, remained apart three or four inches, by which means his sides were but ill defended. On the present occasion besides, owing to the heat, which was excessive, though it was night, the old villain was quite exhausted, and felt as if he had a mountain on his back. He took off his helmet, which was all battered and rusty, and displaying his pale and withered cheeks, began to wipe off the perspiration; all the time, puffing and blowing. Selvaggia clad in the glittering accoutrements of a soldier, showed no signs of fatigue; she rested her elbows on the table, and deep in thought, she was making scratches on it with a knife she held in her hand. Troilus, lightly armed with a small-sized corslet, had a pale and livid aspect, and there was an unquiet restlessness in his eye, that made the beholder shudder to look at him. But he tried to appear at his ease, and to seem a more careless villain than his companion; for in his heart, he was ill pleased to see, that he displayed on his hypocritical visage no other alteration but that which the heat and fatigue had produced. At last, feeling that his countenance betrayed him, he betook himself to a flask of wine, and taking a draught, and thinking to turn the matter off by a joke, he burst out into a loud laugh, which was evidently forced, and said: "Do you know what I was just thinking of, Signor Benedetto?—Do you recollect that night, in the cave of St. Jerome, when I gave you a gentle flap with the scourge—it was quite by mistake, I assure you! —it would have been all the better for you, if you had been as you are now, with that armour on, in which you look just like a French paladin!"

"Would I were now in that cave, and not here!" replied the hoary hypocrite, for unlike Troilus, having no feeling of humanity, he studiously feigned a show of it, with that difference, that always prevails between a novice and an adept in wickedness. "These scenes are distressing to me!" he continued, with an air of sadness—"That poor old Niccolo! his poor family, too!"—then, with a deep sigh: "Ah! State necessity is a hard thing! and the having to submit to it, to obey the laws and decrees, requires great sacrifices!"

The presence of Selvaggia and the soldiers who were on guard at the door, probably induced Nobili to talk in this way. But he had to do with Troilus, who, imitating the tone of his voice and the expression of his countenance, with a feigned sigh, replied: "Ah! I pity you, poor Benedetto! Those glorious bags of golden ducats are mighty troublesome things truly—I mean the laws, the decrees, and State policy—have I omitted any of them—eh?" Nobili twisted and turned about, making signs to Troilus, as much as to say:—mind, they hear us,—and begging him not to expose him.—But Troilus, who felt his heart at that moment overflow with the gall of malignity, as is usually the case with those, who are compelled to hate and despise themselves, and wish to give vent to it, continued with an ironical and wily smile: "My dear Signor Benedetto! you are now tired and done up, like a miller's ass, and you had better save yourself the trouble of keeping on the mask of an honest man.—And if you could but see what a sweat you are in! The drops run down your cheeks, like a rinsed platter! You'll certainly be ill with your exertions! Why it's no use, you know. Do as I do; I am a villain, and I say, I am. I am a traitor; and what then? Kings and commanders, popes and emperors are the same, or worse, when other means fail. I, too, manage my matters as I can, and let who will cast a stone. Say I well, Selvaggia?"

And thereupon rising up, no longer with a smirking countenance, and in a jesting tone, but all at once changing into a wrathful mood, and exhibiting a faithful portrait of the demon within him, he paced up and down, and said in a half-muttered tone: "I can't endure these hypocrites —these serpents with the faces of angels.—Who thanks them for their pains, it's hard to say; neither God nor devil, that's certain!"

And he continued to walk up and down in a sulky mood, and muttering to himself.

Selvaggia paid little or no attention to him. Nobili, half alarmed at this sudden outburst, with a look of astonishment, said: "Hollo! what mean you by this fiery mood?"

Troilus turned on him like a viper; then presently, perceiving how futile his rage was, and how ridiculous it made him appear, he burst out into a loud convulsive laugh, and pouring out a goblet full of wine, presented it to Nobili, at the same time singing a snatch of a song. The old man took it from him, observing: "Go, go, you are a wild youth!" and drank the contents.

At that moment entered Troilus's servant, Michel, who had come with the troop under

Benedetto's command, and said: "There's your wife upstairs—"

"Thank God, I haven't that amongst my troubles, the having a wife!" replied Troilus, laughing.

"Well there's my young mistress, Lisa, whom there's no quieting! She has flung herself on the ground, like a log in a corner; her eyes fixed, and vacant; she seems out of her senses. She keeps saying she wants you, she wants to speak to you; not another word can you get from her; her sister and the servant are with her, but she seems not to hear or understand anything that's said to her; nor can one learn what's the matter with her."

"Plague upon her and you too, you knavish villain!" exclaimed Troilus, approaching his servant with clenched fist, who quickly retreated; whilst Troilus followed, and bawled after him: "Who told you to come and bother me, you hang-dog of a fellow? Am I a chirurgeon or an apothecary? or do you suppose I can cure women of their ailments? Cursed be the hour that you ever came in my way! Mighty strange this truly! —Michel, Michel!" he shouted, more and more angrily; and Michel reappeared.

"Tell her, and tell all of them up there, that we do as we are bid by our superiors—I'm very sorry —but I can't do otherwise—and go to the devil— and don't presume to come into my presence again, unless I call you."

Michel left the room, and Troilus returned to the wine-flask. The wretched traitor wished to forget himself, and to give a momentary respite to the insufferable torments that preyed upon his heart. He drank—said nothing—and for a moment seemed lost in thought; presently, all at once, he exclaimed furiously: "Can we learn, at any rate, what o'clock it is? What an everlasting night? Is there no clock in the belfry-tower?—Don't the hours ever strike in this infernal town!"

A soldier, at the door, replied: "They've strung four of the Cancellieri to the chains, to serve for the weights, and now they touch the ground with their feet, and so the clock has stopped.

Some soldiers, who were lying down on the straw, which served them for beds in the courtyard, laughed at this jest, and after muttering something or other in reply, all again became silent as before. The lamp that was burning on the table now began to grow dim, and was failing for want of oil.

Benedetto had settled himself in a corner, and having made a pillow with his cloak, was sleeping heavily, as were also many in the courtyard, up the stairs and in the street; for it was now the hour before dawn, when sleep is most difficult to resist. As to Selvaggia, who was supporting her head between her hands, it was impossible to say whether she was asleep or awake; and Troilus, who had hoped by drink to drive away the terrible thoughts that haunted him, but had only rendered them more frightful and intolerable, felt his mind agitated and unsettled by a thousand wild and monstrous fancies, which made him imagine that he saw, flitting before his eyes, numberless fearful and shadowy forms, that filled his soul with strange and childish terrors.

The deep silence all around, the dull light of the expiring lamp, served to increase the depression of his spirits; he strove by a violent effort to fix his thoughts on the advantages, he expected to reap from his crimes; to-morrow, at this time, he thought to himself, I shall have what I have so long desired,—I shall have Laodamia—I shall be able to have my will of her!—Then, the Medici will make me rich and powerful; I shall be a man of rank and distinction!—But these dreams of the imagination had, all at once lost, their charms for him: the colours in which fancy had painted them, the life it had breathed into them, were all gone; they seemed but so many delusive phantoms, called forth by some evil genius, only to lure him on and lead him to guilt.

He was frantic to see Benedetto sleeping so quietly, and said: "Why he is a greater villain than I am! he is not more brave than I, has not more courage; and yet—see him there, snoring like a pig, as if he had just accomplished some holy work!"

At last, quite out of patience and angry with himself, at feeling how vile and degraded he was, he said: "Well, after all, it's all a bugbear! Let us think about setting off, and with the morning light these womanish fears will vanish." And going up to Nobili, he pulled him by the arm, saying: "Come, get up! you mustn't sleep any longer; we must be thinking about starting."

The old man awoke, and rubbing his eyes, uttered an—oh!—two or three times, when he first began to move; for his uncomfortable posture, and the pressure of his armour, had quite benumbed his feeling; however, he got up and was soon quite awake.

Selvaggia, too, who during the whole night had never uttered a word, approached, and sat down with them at the table. The soldiers were awake, and the guides set about getting their horses ready; and in the meanwhile, a fresh mountain breeze blowing in at the window, extinguished the failing light of the lamp, and announced the approach of day.

"Now, then," said Troilus, "I've been thinking that we had better send the prisoners on before us, attended by our men and those knavish Panciatichi. You don't like scenes—you say. And I'm not fond of doleful ditties. We shall follow behind at our leisure. The mountain passes are now safe from the Cancellieri, and there is nothing to fear. When we arrive near Prato, you, Sir Benedetto, will direct your steps towards Florence, and will take with you Fanfulla, Bindo, Maurice, and Lisa, with the old servant, whom you will send home. I have made provision for her; she will not want for bread. I'm a gentleman, you know, and know what is demanded of one in my position. Selvaggia and I will take the left hand, and go to Baccio Valori's castle, with Laodamia and Lambert; we have got some matters to settle with both.—And never fear, Selvaggia, but that I will glut your appetite for revenge, provided you remain faithful to me in every emergency."

"On that point make yourself easy," she replied drily; presently she added: "But if you will listen to me, you will let Fanfulla go with us, and the other two, instead of sending them to Florence. If they go there, the government will probably set them at liberty, as they only want Niccolo and no sooner will they be free, than their first thought will be, to come and search for us. You know what sort of spirits they are,—Fanfulla to begin with.—I just thought I would warn you on this point."

"And it's very well you have! What a fool I was! I never gave it a thought! and had it not have been for you, we might have been led a pretty dance. It's true, they are four; and we, with Michel, only three; but then they are bound and unarmed, whereas we have our arms—we might perhaps take with us one or two of these soldiers—but—to tell you the truth—the fewer we are, the better I like it—and in some cases, when one can dispense with witnesses, it is always best. —No, no, alone by ourselves! Eh, it would be a shame! Hollo! Michel!" (he cried out, calling his servant) "bring me some water!—I feel quite stupid—a curse upon that villanous wine!—I feel all in a fever!—Only let us get out of this infernal town!"

The water was brought, and after drinking some of it, he rinsed his face with the rest; and in a few moments, the horses were led to the door. Troilus, Nobili, and Selvaggia mounted, and leaving to Michel and the soldiers all arrangements about the despatch of their prisoners, they turned up the narrow streets of Gavinana into a bye place, whence they could see them start, intending to follow at some little distance.

CHAPTER VIII.

The road that leads from Pistoia to Florence, by the way of Prato, winds round the foot of that chain of mountains which shuts in, on the north, the Val d'Arno. The numerous hills which branch off from the arid and rocky summits of the Apennines, gradually descend into the plain; forming, at first, precipitous and tortuous steeps, which gently slope off into verdant vales, sheltered by thickly clustering chestnut-trees, and at last open into vast undulating plains, richly covered with olives and vines, among which country houses and cottages, situated on the hill-sides, form conspicuous objects. The skirts of these hills, which extend some more, some less, into the plain, at one time terminate by a gentle and imperceptible descent; at another, like promontories, they break off abruptly, with bold, angular projections. Three miles from Prato, on a small isolated hill, stands Montemurlo, a castle belonging to the Strozzi; from which Filippo and Baccio Valori, some years after the period of which we are now treating, were conducted, the latter to the executioner, the former to the prison, which he had assisted, with his own money, to build, and where he found at last a voluntary tomb. So in this world, if not in the other, they balanced their account with the country they had betrayed.

Passing Montemurlo, there is a deep opening or recess in the mountain chain, which rises in the form of an amphitheatre, and at the further extremity is situated, on a slight elevation, the country house, which at that time belonged to Baccio Valori, but at the present day is the property of the Tempi family, called Il Barone. At that point in the high road, where Montemurlo first comes in sight, the troop which conducted Niccolo with his fellow-prisoners arrived, the day after their departure from Gavinana, just when, an hour after sunset, the bells were sending forth their tinkling sounds, some on one side, and some on the other, in the neighbouring hamlets, ringing for the Ave Maria. What were the thoughts, that rose in the hearts of these poor unhappy captives, at those sounds, any one can well imagine, who is capable of feeling the sweet and touching beauty of these lines :—

> "Now was the hour that wakens fond desire
> In men at sea, and melts their thoughtful heart,
> Who in the morn have bid sweet friends farewell ;
> And pilgrim newly on his road with love
> Thrills, if he hear the vesper-bell from far,
> That seems to mourn for the expiring day." *

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* Dante : Purgatorio, Canto viii. 1.—*Cary's Trans.*

And to the ear of these victims of treachery, that sound must have seemed, like the lamentation over very different miseries!

They moved along silent and weary; the old man and the females more so than the rest, both on account of the length of the way, their bodily sufferings, and the agitation of their minds; and they were kept at such a distance from one another by those who had the custody of them, that they had not even the relief, that might be found in an interchange of kind looks and words.

Troilus who followed in the rear with Benedetto, thinking it was now time to separate, stopped along with Selvaggia; and giving a sign, before agreed upon with his men, they too halted, retaining with them Laodamia, Lambert, Maurice, Bindo and Fanfulla; while Niccolo, Lisa, and Mona Fede continued their route, without being aware of what had taken place, towards Florence; and Nobili setting spurs to his horse, had soon ridden up to them.

Troilus, who did not wish his prisoners to know, whither they were being taken, had given Michel orders accordingly; so that as soon as they stopped, their eyes were bandaged; they were all directed to dismount (except Laodamia, whose eyes they were satisfied with binding) and their horses were led by one of the troopers, to the company that was proceeding forward with Niccolo. To these operations, which certainly foreboded no good, the prisoners offered no resistance. For what could they do? Their arms were fast bound on their breasts, with ropes several times wound round, and they were unwilling to divert their enemies by displaying an impotent rage. Uttering not a word, they remained in momentary expectation of death; as they thought, for certain, that they designed to murder them in some ditch; but instead, they felt their hands in different parts of their body, trying whether the ropes were tight, or rendering them more secure. With the ends of the ropes they were presently bound all together, two before and two behind: a voice shouted: *Go on!* and they proceeded forward, Michel leading Laodamia's horse. Some men of the troop had remained behind, to aid in these preparations; when they were finished, Troilus dismissed them; and they too set off and rejoined those who had gone on.

Troilus, with his company, after proceeding about fifty yards, arrived at the bridge alle Troie, from which point, in order to reach Il Barone, they had to quit the main road, and passing the bridge, turned to the left by a narrow lane; here he directed Michel to halt the prisoners, and cause them to turn round two or three times, so that they might lose the direction of their route; and the same thing was done to Laodamia's horse; when, starting once more, after an hour's journeying they arrived at the outer gate of the castle. It was then quite dark.

Two large mastiffs, hearing the sound of steps, rushed with fury to the bars of the gate, growling and barking; but a figure appearing from within, came between them and the gate, and driving them away with kicks and blows, said in a low, but harsh tone: "Get away, Griffin, to your kennel! —go in, Alano!" and the dogs slunk away, muttering a low growl. The gate being opened they all entered, and the blindfolded captives heard the harsh banging sound, occasioned by the closing of the double gates. They went forward; whilst Troilus and Selvaggia stopped with the person who had let them in, and who had the care of the mansion. He had formerly been a bandit, but by his master's influence the sentence of outlawry had been taken off from him.

"Welcome, my good masters!" he said; "Signor Baccio has just sent a messenger to inform me, that you were coming, and that I was to attend to your wishes on all points. You will be so good, therefore, as to favour me with your commands. I have made what preparations I could. But in this neighbourhood, we are but poorly off. You will excuse it, I hope."

"Oh, as for that, it's but little we want—but first of all, what's your name, my good man?"

"My father, who kept an inn at Maremma—near Vada—don't you know it?—the hostelry that's called the Forca de Preti—had me christened John. Afterwards, when I was in the family of the sheriff of Pisa, they called me Corporal Badtime. Now the countrymen about here, when they are in an ill-humour with me, call me the gaoler; when they speak familiarly, they call me Sir Vanni. To you, I am whatever you please."

"Well then, good Sir Vanni," said Troilus laughingly, "I am come to stay with you for a day—at the most two. But first of all, is there a chamber, a cellar, a vault, or any kind of hole, with good strong doors and iron bars, to confine these persons in, that you saw pass through the gate, strung together like Bologna sausages, if you observed?"

"Ah, you want rooms to serve as a dungeon—eh?—why, this castle, from top to bottom, is nothing else but a prison; it might be taken for the tower of Volterra."

"That's all right.—That point's settled.—Well then, you saw, I suppose—there was a young lady on horseback. For her, you must prepare the best room; in a word, the best of everything you have."

"Why, the best thing will be to put her into the yellow chamber, where Sir Baccio's grandmother used to be; at least, so I have heard say by certain old men hereabouts.—What's more, they say that sounds are heard in that room—I, for my part, never heard anything of the sort;—it's true, I don't sleep there, as I live in a peasant's house hard by. However, they relate a strange hobgoblin story of this lady, in the time of Cosimo the elder, about a certain priest who attended the house, and one day disappeared; they say, that from jealousy, she shut him up in an underground cave, and by means of a trap-door, that communicated with it from her room, she let down to him, with a cord, a small quantity of mouldy bread, and after that gave him nothing more—and many years after, he is said to have been found with his hands all gnawed, and shrivelled up and rigid like the skin of a grasshopper—and now they say, that on St. John's night, they are both seen going round the terrace, beneath the battlements; and then at last, they tumble down into that same cave."

"If that's all we have to fear, it's not much; as it's a long time between now and the festival of St. John. Now, however, let us think about putting these people in ward, and find something to give them to eat, as I have no intention of serving them as the grandame did the priest.—Curse it, no! I shouldn't like, when I'm dead, to have to dance a reel on the battlements with these fellows by my side."

"Oh, then! they are prisoners to be treated like gentlemen?" asked the bailiff, with an air that showed, he would as readily have executed an order for hanging them up by the neck.

"That is," replied Troilus, turning to Selvaggia, "three out of the four. As to the fourth, my comrade here will do what he pleases; and—if he has a mind to——"

"Oh! it's all one to me," replied the other hastily, to save Troilus the trouble of explaining. "You know it is said: 'He who is bound, must delve the ground;' whatever you bid, I shall do, neither more nor less."

"A man more to my hand could not have been found, if he had been made on purpose," said Troilus, as he moved on, preceded by the bailiff to show him the way. Michel, with the prisoners, as the place was strange to him, was standing waiting on the lawn in front of the house; when Troilus and Selvaggia rejoined them, they prepared at last to go in.

But here, not from any fondness for descriptions, but for the better understanding of our story, it is necessary to give some account of this country-house, or castle which we prefer calling it; for as everybody knows, the mansions of that period partook of the character both of one and the other.

The ground-plan of the building was a quadrangle, the front of which was longer than the sides; an open space in the centre formed the courtyard, around which ran a porch; in one corner was a well with two stone pillars, on which rested transversely a beam, from which the pulley was suspended. The front, which consisted entirely of square slabs of crumbling stone, had but very few windows, at great distances from each other, with a network of iron bars so closely ranged, that you could with difficulty pass a hand through. To the gate, which was about half as high again as the stature of a man from the ground, you ascended by four zigzag paths, on an incline, with rows of stone to serve as steps; here grew in undisturbed luxuriance nettles, briars, and weeds of all sorts. The oak door was covered all over with iron panels, and strengthened with huge nails; up above, over the gateway rose a tower, but little higher than the rest of the building, and the top of both was furnished with a terrace, supported on arches and surmounted with Ghibelline battlements.

When you entered you could see right to the top of the tower; up above there was a soppalco or kind of loft, from which, if occasion required it, the person in possession could easily hurl down missiles, that would stop the further progress of any one, who was intending to pay them an unwelcome visit.

The appearance of this mansion, though considerably altered by the Michelangelic inspirations of an architect of the 16th century, still preserves many traces of its ancient structure. The ground plan is the same, and the tower above the gateway, shorn, indeed, of its battlements, serves for the clock. The stone slabs of the front are still visible in parts; and even in the farthest room of the ground floor to the left, there is still a bed and furniture of yellow silk, as if prescription had accorded to it the exclusion of every other colour. Upon striking against the walls in one place, a hollow sound was heard. Perhaps it was here that the well was, but we cannot take upon our selves to vouch for it.

Troilus, before bringing his prisoners in, wished to inspect the place. He ordered Michel to wait a few moments, as they, bandaged and fettered as they were, and not knowing whether they were guarded by many or by few, would not think of stirring. The bailiff, after groping at the lock for some time, at last introduced into it an enormous key, which, owing to the rusty state of both, turned round with a harsh, screeching noise, and it required some time and force to open the door. It was opened at last, however, and the keeper, with Troilus and Selvaggia entered. He took a lantern, which he had left burning in a corner, and turning to the left they ascended four steps, and entered the suite of apartments, which the head of the family usually occupied. First of all was an ante-room, filled with ancestral portraits, some in the lucco, some in coats of mail, others dressed as ecclesiastics; on one side stood a rack filled with various weapons, swords and warlike accoutrements; after this they came to a grand reception room; and last of all, the famous yellow chamber, furnished with yellow damask (for those times, this was a great piece of luxury), a bed with wreathed columns of dark walnut wood, chests, chairs, and presses; in a word, the furniture consisted of whatever was costly and elegant in the fourteenth century.

As they entered they saw, by the light of the lantern, flying about in all directions a number of large bats; at which their attendant exclaimed angrily: "Curse 'em! they come out of this infernal hole!—if one don't shut these trap-doors!'—

And he pointed to an aperture in the wall, like a cupboard, not far from the bed, beneath which was a kneeling-stool. Troilus, on going near to it, saw that it was not a cupboard, but was much more like a well. Over it was suspended a pulley with a rope attached, which went down into this dark abyss; from which there came up that cold, damp air, which proceeds from underground places, accompanied with the mouldy, earthy smell peculiar to such localities. On shaking the rope a little, they could hear some solid substance knock against the walls with a deep cavernous sound, which seemed to rise up from some four or five hundred yards below the earth. He turned to his guide, who had just opened the windows, and was trying to drive out the bats, and said with a laugh: "It was here, where our worthy friend the priest was, I suppose."

"Yes, there, there—so they say."

"And where does this well go to?"

"God knows. If we were to turn the house topsy-turvy, perhaps we might discover; for, in none of the cellars or underground apartments are there any traces of an outlet, or of any communication with this place down below. One day, I wished to see how long the rope was.—Eh—eh! it's longer than twice the depth to the bottom of the cellars, at least."

"Oh! but don't you say, that the man was found some years afterwards?"

"Such things are said by the old men here—but who has seen them?—No one."

At that instant, more bats flying up from the well, struck Troilus's breast and face with their wings; upon which, drawing back with a shudder, he put his hands to the trap-doors, and banged them to with such violence that they remained closed. He then observed that they were painted, and so disposed as to form a sort of tablet, on which were represented two saints; and a thin column between them served very artistically to hide the joining, when the two leaves were not as now all cracked and bent.

"Oh, oh!" cried Troilus, "behind the cross is the devil, as the Spaniards say—and here, behind the saints, was the friar!—But come, and let us leave him to himself, and think about our own matters. This, then, is the place for the young lady.—Very well——but, what's that on the table there? Bravo, good Vanni—wine, fruit!—Why, thou art a fine fellow, to be sure.—If I were Pope, I'd make thee a cardinal. And now let us go and see the lodgings for the others."

The attendant, after lighting two lamps which he left there, took up his lantern again, and going straight forward, they came back into the court-yard once more. Opposite the great gate, at the further end, was a low door, which was approached by a sloping descent, formed in the ground. When, after some trouble it was opened, the ground still, for a few steps further, led down through a kind of passage, which brought them to a vaulted corridor of great extent; for it went all round under the portico, from which it was lighted by means of square apertures in the pavement above, and fast closed by strong iron gratings. In this place were kept casks, firewood, lumber, tools, and all sorts of rubbish.

"I should like to know whether they'll think of getting out of this, my masters," said the bailiff. For neither Troilus nor Selvaggia, after looking round and making the circuit of this subterranean passage, could feel any doubt about the security of such a prison.

"Will this suit you?" said Troilus to his female companion; "as I have settled my own matters, from a feeling of good fellowship I should wish you to arrange yours to your heart's content."

"As for me, I am quite satisfied." And glancing her eye round, and stamping with her foot, she said: "Here, by heaven, I shall be mistress! Here, the courtesan may be cursed and reviled, but mocked and scorned——"

"Bravo! Selvaggia—I like this—why I'm almost inclined to envy you. And yet my chance is not to be despised! but to have an enemy, who has treated you as you know how!—to have dogged his steps for years—to have watched his movements—and at last to have to say—I have him in my clutches—he is mine, to do what I will with!

I can let him linger to death, slowly, in ten years, or take his life in a moment, just as I please ! and neither heaven nor hell can loose him from my grasp——Ah, I envy you, I do indeed.—May you richly enjoy your prize—for such luck lights on few."

"And so I will," said Selvaggia, pressing her teeth close together; and then turning to Vanni, she said: "Three of them you will bind up here on the right, as you turn the corner by the wall, but out of sight of the other;—I'll show you presently the one, you are to tie up, here on the left to that ring, just there between the two casks —do you understand me?"

"I understand."

"Now let us go to them," said Troilus and Selvaggia, both together, whilst the former added: "for you and I have earned our prizes pretty well.—On one point, however, I am curious," said Troilus, stopping; "and that is to see to-morrow morning, what sort of a hand you have made of it—and how you have thriven. In the days of your ancestors, the women of the elect people were skilful in devising new ways to destroy Christians—just like that damsel, who drove a nail through the temple of the captain, when he was a-sleeping in her house."

"And I," replied Selvaggia, "am curious on another point—to know to-morrow, what gallantry you have practised, to induce that beautiful and angelic creature, to become enamoured of such as you."

"Well, to tell you the truth—now it's come to the point—I find myself rather more at a loss than I expected. What with this cursed siege—and passing one's whole time amongst friars and musket-shots, I have forgotten how to begin to prattle with a pretty girl. It's the worst thing in the world to be out of practice! Well now, how shall I make up to her? Just think, how exasperated she'll be!—and then to expect her to attend to soft words and endearments! let me see—I'll try. —At all events no one can send us adrift from this place, and we have time, and to spare; and should she be so minded, as to yield easily, so much the better; in love, force spoils all.—But if after a time, she'll not hear reason—then—why she must blame herself; and besides, worse has happened to many others before now.—To give you one instance, dost thou remember in the history of thy race, about the tribe of Benjamin—and the wife of that priest—Levite, I mean;—well didn't it fare worse with her?"

Troilus kept dallying with such like idle and frivolous talk, as he slowly moved across the court-yard. Now that the moment was come, when he had to appear, without a mask, in the presence of a creature so elevated and so noble, who had been used to see herself treated with the most delicate respect by all, and who, with a single glance of her eye, would make him cower before her, he felt constrained and awkward, and an unaccountable nervousness seized upon him. And yet draw back he could not. What would Selvaggia think of him? what would his friends in the camp say, who must come to hear of the affair sooner or later?

It was the fate of this miserable young man, to have been led astray, and rendered still more wicked by a pitiable vanity.—In order to gain time, and try and summon up fresh courage, he thought of a new device. Turning to the steward, he said:

" I say, Vanni; I want to speak to you.—This young lass, who is waiting outside—probably you are aware already—she's not here with her own good will—I shouldn't like to go and take her by surprise.—Were there now some female here—have you not a wife, by any chance?"

" Why, I had one; but the priest came for her, come Christmas a year, to lay her in the churchyard—and ne'er a female is there here."

" It can't be helped," muttered Troilus to himself, and then raising his voice, he said: " We'll do without; so, now let us go."

He called Michel, and said to him: " Take this young lady, as soon as she has dismounted, take her to the room yonder, that you see in the corner there. You will try and cheer her up, and tell her she needn't fear any harm; and when you have taken the bandage off her eyes, you'll leave her alone—and to any questions she may ask, you are to give no answer. When you go out, shut the door, and bring me the key."

Selvaggia then turning to Vanni, said: " And do you conduct those others below, and tie them up in the way I've told you."

Then going out on the terrace opposite the great gate, she pointed out Lambert to him, and added: "That's the one that you are to tie up separately, between the two casks.—But wait a moment, till they have disposed of the young woman."

Michel went down to the lawn, and taking the bridle of Laodamia's horse in his hand, he led it to the entrance door, and in the gentlest tone he could, said to her:—"My lady, be so good as to dismount, and I will help you."

"O God, have pity on me!—on us!" said the poor girl, hastening to dismount, to save herself from his assistance. When she had alighted, Michel took her by the hand, saying: "Don't fear; nobody will do you any harm—come with me. Mind—there are four steps—now it's all straight—walk along, and don't be afraid—"

And taking her to the yellow chamber, in about two minutes he quitted the room, locked the door, and brought Troilus the key, and said: "She seems to me more dead than alive—unless you find some means to comfort her—she'll be gone soon!—Mind you don't find her like those birds, which, when put into a cage, won't eat, and in an hour or two stretch their wings, and escape from their captivity and their sorrows together."

Troilus made no reply; but he showed by his manner, he was greatly annoyed.

The bailiff then brought along the other four prisoners. When they were inside, he shut the door, and then conducted them to the place where he had been directed; coming back in a minute or two, he delivered the key to Selvaggia, saying: "'Tis done. You said, I think, that you wished them to have something to eat? Let me go then to the house where I live."

He left them; and in about a quarter of an hour, returned with a basket, and said: "I'm afraid I have tired your patience; but it's some way off, where I live." And after taking the food to the prisoners, he came and asked Troilus whether he wanted anything.

"No," he replied, "go, and to-morrow let me see you at sunrise."

The bailiff bade them good night, with an expressive smile, and said: "Shut the house close, and put up the bar; for in this country, men sow beans and reap bandits." He then left them, and went his way; whilst they put up the bar, as he had told them. Troilus looking at his companion, said: "If we are not safe here, it's a pity!" And fetching a deep breath, he added: "Well, here we are;—now then, Selvaggia, let each of us set about our own business."

Thereupon, he directed his steps to the room, in which Laodamia was; she, to the underground cellar, with the key in one hand, and the bailiff's lantern in the other.

As she entered, Fanfulla, who thought it was the gaoler, said: "Hollo, master! you have brought us our food, and yet leave us with our hands tied! Do you suppose we can peck it up like pigeons?"

Selvaggia, without making any reply, went straight to the spot, where Lambert was sitting on the ground, in silent despair, thinking only of Laodamia, and praying God to aid and protect her, since he himself was now in a condition to do neither.

Selvaggia, stopping before him, raised the lantern, to allow the light to fall full on her face; and then said: "It's I!—do you know me, Lambert?"

Lambert did indeed know her; and it made his heart sink within him; he utterly lost all hope, when he remembered the temper of Selvaggia, and how they had parted the last time; and overwhelmed with grief, he said to himself: "O God, O God! to think that Laodamia is in the power of this desperate girl!—"

He did not dare to speak, not knowing what to say to her, and fearing to make matters worse; he merely looked at her with an eye, that betokened the utmost alarm and distress.

Selvaggia placed the lantern on the ground, and folding her arms on her bosom, as if to keep down the violent palpitation, that was evident in spite of her corslet, she said, in a voice that penetrated to the inmost recesses of Lambert's heart: "Do you remember, young man, with what deep affection Selvaggia has loved you, ever since the day she first knew you?—do you remember—on the bauks of the Po—on that night—with what entreaties—and they were humble, Lambert!—

she asked of you—not love—for of that she did not deem herself worthy, but a touch of pity?—do you remember?—did you vouchsafe to grant her request?—No, you refused it.——Was Selvaggia angry? did she curse you?—No, she blessed you, and left you; and never troubled you more,—as she thought—I am not worthy even of so slight a boon as this.——But the miserable Selvaggia did not abandon all hope. Without your knowledge—without your seeing her, she informed herself of your movements, learnt whither you were going, and tracked your steps, but she never came near you again, but once; and then, on the day of the memorable battle, when she saw a spear aimed at you, and about to pierce your heart—and there was nothing could have saved you, you know!—I shielded you then with my bosom, and the chill of that iron weapon, as it entered my body, was to me a delicious feeling,—you were safe, and therefore my sufferings were over.—So I thought then.—Unhappy being!—they had scarce begun!—Falling into the sea;—then languishing in the hold of a galley—afterwards exposed to the horrors of a hospital—then a wanderer in the streets—after that, to drag myself along, weak and ill, for many a weary mile—in the rain, exposed to the wind and cold—in hunger—in thirst—in want—and yet ever onward, ever clinging to my hope in you,—not love, you know—I tell you, for I am not so weak as you think me—not love, but pity—a word of kindness, a look of compassion. I came to Florence; I toiled—I strove in a thousand ways; I suffered and waited on—you know how I trembled, and hesitated to speak to you,—it seemed to me, as if I were in the presence of a superior being—and I made myself as nothing—I humbled myself—I placed myself beneath your feet—And thou hadst the heart—thou wert not ashamed to treat me with scorn and outrage.—But how was it, you could bring yourself to treat me so?——"

And the poor girl, with her hands extended towards Lambert, remained for a few moments, without moving, or saying a word.

"You treated me as ill as you could: had you have killed me—I had thanked you—I had blessed you—but you scorned and despised me. I have longed to show you, that you could hate, that you could kill Selvaggia,—but not despise her. I have longed for vengeance, I have sought to obtain it; I have passed many a livelong day, and many a sleepless night, to compass it; and at last I have it.—Laodamia is here—thou art here—you are all here, in the power of Selvaggia, the courtesan, the outcast, the refuse of the world,—of her, whom all trample on, whom all loathe, who has never met with a human being, never found a heart—not even a father's—to bestow on her a feeling of affection—"

Here she drew forth her dagger from its sheath, which Lambert expected she was about to plunge into his heart; and, overcome by her strong and passionate emotions, she burst into a flood of tears at the thought of her loneliness and desolation, and exclaimed: " And not even now shall I obtain it!" —(and she proceeded to cut the cords, with which Lambert was bound)—" not even thus, by giving you life and liberty, and saving Laodamia, whom you love,—shall I not even thus obtain the object of my first prayer, that you would care for me as you do for your horse, or your hound?"

And whilst, in a tone no longer stern, but humble and imploring, she finished these words, Lambert, released from his bonds, had with an impulse of gratitude, of tenderness, and admiration, thrown himself at her feet, and exclaimed, in a voice choked with emotion: " My guardian angel!"

Selvaggia raised her hands to Heaven, tremulous with joy; and there shone upon her countenance, unseen before, a pure and serene expression, as she exclaimed:

" God of mercy!—at last even I, too, bless and praise Thee—and thank Thee for having created me——"

She continued for some moments in this fixed and almost ecstatic posture; then letting her arms sink down, she added, as if speaking to herself: " I had endured so much!"—Presently making a sudden start, she said sharply and energetically: " Up, Lambert, there's no time to be lost.—You must know that Troilus, after betraying all the rest, has formed a wicked design upon Laodamia, and is now with her in this castle. There is no doubt, we shall arrive in time; he had resolved not to use force, except as a last resource. Let us go and set the others free, and all go together to deliver her."

As she spoke, she proceeded with Lambert to the further end of this subterranean chamber, where the rest were bound, and hastily cut their ropes; whilst they, stupefied and amazed, and not knowing what to think, with a multitude of confused words, alternately expressed their thanks, and asked questions; and Lambert, too, as he lent his assistance in releasing them, said in a tumult of joy and fear: "You'll see—you'll know by-and-by—it's an angel from heaven—Quick, quick—that that traitor may not escape us—"

And he told them about Troilus, and his designs, and that he was in the castle with Laodamia—so that they were barely set free, before they rushed in a body out of the cellar in which they were, with their hearts full of rage against that villain; and without either thinking or caring about their being unarmed, they hurried along to tear him to pieces, with tooth and nail. But fortune luckily furnished them with weapons: for as soon as they entered the first antechamber, they observed the rack full of arms, and each took a weapon. Lambert alone, without stopping or thinking of anything else, rushed with Selvaggia to the door of the yellow chamber; which Troilus, free from all apprehensions on the score of danger, had only closed with the latch.

To open it, to spring upon Troilus, and seize him by the neck, and throw him to the ground, was with Lambert, but the work of an instant.

The traitor, at the moment when they entered, was standing in the middle of the room, at a distance from Laodamia, who was poising herself on the edge of the trap-door, ready to hurl herself down; and it was evident that this wretched villain, despairing of accomplishing his object, except by violence, had reduced the poor girl to this last and desperate defence.

In a second or two his companions joined him; and Maurice, brandishing a sword over Troilus, as he lay on the ground, would have killed him, had not Lambert called out: "Hold!" so that his servant withheld the blow, and drew back, his eyes flashing fury all the while.

For some moments no one uttered a word. The traitor, terror-stricken, and palpitating, with his eye-balls ready to burst from his head, and pale as death, was still on the ground, held down now by Fanfulla and Bindo; for Lambert had left him, to run to Laodamia, who had sunk on her knees, and white as a marble statue, was, with eyes raised to Heaven, pouring forth her gratitude, which she did more from her heart than by her voice.

Lambert knelt down beside her, and she reclined her head upon his shoulder. She remained in this attitude for a moment, during which she was on the point of fainting, but Selvaggia brought her some of the wine, that had been placed on the table, and after taking a little, the living hue returned once more to her cheeks.

"Thou art safe, my darling!" said Lambert to her; and the very muscles of his countenance seemed to quiver with excess of joy.

"Oh! let us be gone, for the love of God!" said Laodamia, in a feeble voice, for the sight of this place, and of Troilus, made her shudder; and rising up with some difficulty, aided by Lambert, and supported also by Selvaggia, she left the room, and with tottering steps slowly made her way to an adjoining apartment, where she sank, quite exhausted, on a chair, placed her hands on Lambert's shoulder, who was kneeling before her, and looked upon him with an ineffable expression of tenderness. Poor Selvaggia, who was standing a few steps behind, was about to retire; for what her feelings were at that moment, let the reader imagine; when presently Lambert said: "And do you know who has liberated me, and who it is that has saved your life and honour? This—she, of whom I once spoke to you—she, whom you felt for so much—Selvaggia."

"Oh!—this is Selvaggia, then!" Laodamia exclaimed, with a start of surprise, and in a moment all her sad history recurred to her mind; and as she thought of the pain she must feel to see her thus with Lambert, she withdrew her arms with a quick and timid movement, and joining her hands in a supplicating attitude, she turned towards her with a look, that seemed to crave her forgiveness, and said: "Oh, Selvaggia!—I couldn't know!—"

"Yes, it is I," she replied, approaching nearer to them; and her voice, her countenance, her very attitude, showed what were the struggles of her lone and desolate heart. "It is I," she continued, "who have had a long—a horrid thought of vengeance against Lambert—against you.—But I said to myself:—What dost thou want, poor wretch; what hast thou been in search of all these years? to find one who does not hate you, who does not scorn you—to find a heart that would love you—to find, if not love, at least kindness—to enjoy, if but once before you die—if only once, a look, a word of affection and pity. And dost thou hope to attain it thus? to obtain it by revenge?—See, then, what my revenge has been!—Tell me, will you at least have a kindly feeling for this poor unhappy creature?—May I hope for it now?—"

Laodamia attempted to rise, and rush into her arms, but her strength failed her, and she sunk back upon her seat, but with her hands still extended towards Selvaggia; who, with a cry of joy, threw herself into the arms of Laodamia.—And the two girls remained locked for some moments in the most tender and ardent embraces.

CHAPTER IX.

Troilus was all this time on the ground: too proud to sue for pity, or to descend to any act of meanness, he silently awaited his fate. Fanfulla, but still more Maurice, felt his hands itch, and had a great hankering to dispatch him, and end the matter; but their respect for Lambert restrained them both; as he had so peremptorily ordered his servant not to touch him. The latter, however, scornfully shaking his finger at him, could not forbear saying:

"Tank, tank, Sir Lampert.—If he wer no my master, thou wouldst now pe purning down wid te tevil."

Troilus looked at him with a glance, that was equally expressive of rage and contempt; and then added, without addressing himself to any body in particular:

"You have reason to boast, indeed, of your glorious achievement; four against one—and that one, you attacked from behind, and when he was off his guard—it's worthy of you.—You very well knew, that if you gave me time to turn round, that eight such fellows as you, could not have mastered me."

"Vile scoundrel!" exclaimed Bindo, (and with a thrust he pushed Fanfulla aside, so that Troilus was left free) "take your sword, and if I alone am not a match for you, then you are no traitor."

Troilus had scarce time to regain his feet, and clap his hand to the hilt of his sword, before Maurice and Fanfulla had him again tightly in their grasp.

"Thou art a foolish youth, Bindo," said Fanfulla; "thou to match thyself with this scoundrel? Where Fanfulla is, such things are not allowed."

At that moment, Lambert came in; he had overheard their dialogue, and exclaimed eagerly:

"And why not allowed? not indeed with Bindo—but with me, for I trow, this fellow's blood is as needful to me as the air I breathe; I'd give my life to hew him to pieces; and I'm not a knave of his vile race, to wish for any advantage, or to avail myself of a sudden surprise,—or of treachery."

"I thought thee a more discreet youth," said Fanfulla; and seizing Troilus's sword, he drew it from the sheath; for being tightly held by the arm, he couldn't prevent him, and then added: "Your honourable weapon to be stained by clashing with a traitor's? If I consent to such a thing, may I have to serve afoot again—and may I break my neck, as I break this sword." And fixing its point on the ground, he leant upon it and broke it into three pieces.

Lambert was almost beside himself with fury;

he called to Fanfulla, his eyes and visage flashing fire:

"Thou dost but treat me with a churl's discourtesy—and by the holy rood, I'll teach thee to show me more respect—"

And furious with rage, he drew his sword from the scabbard. Fanfulla took no notice—he neither stirred nor changed colour; he didn't even move a muscle; and at that instant, Laodamia, supported by Selvaggia, came to the door and called out:

"Lambert! will you break my heart?"

The young man was quiet in a moment, and turning round, stood before her humble and abashed.

"Let not a hair of Troilus be touched," she continued—"it is not I who command you, but God, by my mouth.—He alone knows our sins, He alone can be their just and righteous avenger. I pardon Troilus—and if I pardon him, who is it that wishes to take vengeance on him?—Let us quit, and that at once, this wretched place. Let him remain; and let him be confined, so that he cannot do us any injury—and by the time he can, we shall not, thank God, have anything to fear from him."

Lambert during these words had put his sword back into its sheath; and approaching Laodamia, he took her hand and said: "Angelic creature! it shall be as you say, neither more nor less—though perhaps some day, we may have cause to repent of it."

Then turning to Maurice, he said: "Bind this fellow, with his hands behind his back, so that he may not be able to get loose, to this bed-post:—and let us be gone. To-morrow, when they come and set him free, we shall be far away; and besides, we shall know that we have to be on our guard against him."

Then turning to Troilus, he stood for a minute undecided, as if he was going to say something or other to him; but he merely shook his head in a contemptuous manner, and going out with Laodamia and the rest, left the traitor bound in such a way, that, without assistance, it was impossible he could liberate himself.

When they had got into the ante-room, Lambert went up to Fanfulla; and, with a smile, taking hold of his hand, said to him: "I was wrong, my good brother; I pray you be not angry with me."

"I am never angry with anybody, who comes up to me, with his sword in hand, face to face—and you could not come otherwise.—And for myself, when I was a youthful cavalier, half a word was enough to make me clutch at my sword's hilt.—But come, no more on't, for I like you the better for it."

With all these doings, it was now near midnight. It was therefore a very opportune time for them to decamp, without being heard or seen, and consequently without leaving any trace of the direction they had taken. Laodamia was urgent for their departure; and Selvaggia, along with Maurice, having made their way to the stable, saddled the three horses, and brought them out upon the lawn in front of the house.

When Laodamia attempted to move off the seat, on which she had again sat down, her strength but ill corresponded with her eagerness to get away from this hateful place. If anything however ought to excite our surprise, it is, that she was able so long to bear up. But it not unfrequently happens that persons, who are naturally weak, either from age or sex, are found to support themselves in the midst of the most trying and terrible circumstances in a most marvellous manner, sustained by the energy of their minds, and the calm self-possession produced by a sense of danger, or by the mind being nerved up by some extraordinary passion or emotion of the soul. Let the causes cease to operate, and then, nature deprived of its energy, sinks down lower, in proportion to the greatness of the effort that sustained it.

So it happened to poor Laodamia. Relieved from the terrible danger she had been in, and finding herself safe and unharmed, with Lambert and her brother, she felt a cold torpid feeling diffuse itself through her whole frame; which, however, had something of a pleasurable sensation in it; it seemed as if the vital principle were gradually languishing away. Her last action, when she recalled Lambert to himself, and interposed to save the life of Troilus, had given the last blow to her failing powers; a cold shudder pervaded her limbs, with a palpitation at her heart, which rendered its beating violent and unequal; her mind too became clouded, and seemed to be filled with a confusion of painful images.

"Oh! Lambert," she said in a feeble voice, while she vainly endeavoured to rise, "I feel my mind becoming dark and confused—my life is going from me—Oh! take me in your arms—carry me away somewhere else—I am thy bride—is it true? It's not a dream—I can die near you—you can aid me—support my head.—Oh! if I could but recollect, but my ideas are so disordered! You gave me the ring in St. Mark's—I am your own Laodamia—am I not?"

"Oh! yes, Laodamia, my darling girl; make yourself easy—we are indeed betrothed—and thou art with thy own Lambert—God and your father gave you to him, and he will never leave you any more—"

"My father! did you say—" and the scene at Gavinana, and Niccolo's danger rose before her mind, without her being able to distinguish, whether it was a reality or only some frightful imagination, something that had happened, or something that was impending.

"Oh! my dear Lambert," she said, weeping, "Tell me, if you can—whether it's true, that they wanted to take him prisoner—or perhaps—they have taken him already—perhaps he is in prison—then they will put him to the torture—what, if he should be exposed to it now?—if he were fastened to the rope? Oh! father, my poor father! Poor unhappy old man!—Tell me, tell me—if you know!" And she wept so bitterly, that it would have excited pity in a stone.

Lambert, almost distracted, endeavoured to calm her mind, declaring that he knew nothing; and by a thousand protestations strove to reassure her. Bindo, with the warm affection of a heart at fifteen, did the same, and with eyes drenched with tears, almost gave himself up to despair, fearing his sister's condition was much worse than it really was. Maurice, who had just come to announce that the horses were ready, seeing his master in such distress, all through Troilus, could not make himself easy at the thought of his being left behind alive. The worthy Swiss was almost frantic, and biting his nails, darted, from time to time, side glances towards the door of the yellow chamber, in which the traitor was left bound, and kept saying to himself: "I hafe no trunk fine with Messer Droile—Oh! if my master should say:—Maurice, you do what you think is te pest!" And here, he would shake his head; for according to his ideas, under no circumstances was it permitted to injure those with whom one had drunk wine; so great was his regard for that beverage. And it was for that reason, that he would not touch it on the evening of the reconciliation; and though the rest accorded their forgiveness, he, by an almost instinctive fidelity, similar to that of the canine race (and we would have the epithet considered as a eulogy) had continued implacable.

The fears occasioned by Laodamia's condition, though grave and alarming, were not such, but that they yielded to the still greater fear of staying in this place, till some unforeseen obstacle should present itself to their flight. When she appeared somewhat composed, and the cloud that hung over her mind in great measure dispelled, Lambert and his companions carried her down, and with the greatest care placed her on one of the horses; and holding her up on both sides, they took the road by the plain, under the guidance of Selvaggia.

But whither were they to go, at such a time, with so many objects of alarm, and so many enemies to be apprehended in every direction ? Where take the poor invalid Laodamia, who at most could travel but a mile or two, but would be in danger of her life, unless she could soon have some repose ?

Montemurlo was situated on an eminence not far distant. Lambert and Bindo knew the priest, and in former years had often paid him a visit from Niccolo's country house, which was near Poggio à Caiano. They resolved to go to him at once, by the most direct path. Being well acquainted with the country, they soon discovered the road to be taken, notwithstanding the darkness; and bidding Laodamia keep up her spirits, they boldly set forward.

But Selvaggia, who was in front, stopped all at once, and striking her forehead with her hand, exclaimed: "We have done one very foolish thing! Troilus's servant, Michel, he's left behind, is he not, free, and at liberty in the house ?—none of us ever thought about him;—God knows whether or no he has heard and seen all that has passed.—Perhaps he has already set his master at liberty; and they will be on our track presently, that villain and his troopers!"

Fanfulla, without waiting an instant, cried out, as he turned round to retrace his steps: "I'll take care of that matter, and don't you disturb yourselves."——And Maurice, without asking Lambert's permission, was after him as fast as his legs would carry him.

The rest remained for a moment, undecided what to do; but thinking two were enough for that business, and unwilling to render Laodamia's escort too scanty, they pursued their way to Montemurlo.

As Fanfulla and Maurice were hastening on their way back, now running, now walking nimbly, according as the road was steep or otherwise, an idea struck the latter, which seemed to him a very admirable one; and resolving to sound his companion, he began by saying, in broken sentences, as he was quite out of breath: "Ah! my master—is—too—goot—too much feeling—for that rascal—draitor!—Not leave him bound—but hanged—and then we no hafe to turn pack—have no to pe afraid—"

"And so—I would have done—if it had rested with me—and not so much forbearance.—But it was—mistress,—well to be sure, women's hearts have no rind.—"

"It was—that my master hafe trunk—but

Maurice, the rogue, hafe not trunk vine with Messer Droile, and therefore he can asshust the matter, if Messer Fanfulle has no opshection.—"

Fanfulla could not altogether understand the subtle distinction of *drinking* or *not drinking;* but he was running, and it was troublesome to talk; besides, his head was busy with other matters, so that he made no reply; and in this way they arrived at the castle.

They found the outer gate open, as they had left it. In three or four steps, up the zigzag path, they were at the entrance-door, which appeared not to have been touched, but was still ajar. They entered, and holding their breath, stood still; listening anxiously, they heard Troilus calling Michel, in a voice that made the passages of the castle ring again; and every now and then he uttered in a lower tone the most tremendous imprecations, blaspheming heaven and earth, and cursing the hour in which he was born.

"Just hear how the fellow raves!" said Fanfulla, laughing. "Well I declare, since we left, there has not been the least stir—and here we are again; please God, we'll be as quiet, in what remains to be done.—That knave Michel has gone to roost in some of the chambers above;—depend on't, he has drenched himself with wine this evening; besides too, he must have been well done up,—so that his master might have howled long enough,—before he'd ever have heard him, I'm sure. Now then, first of all, let's shut this door, that he may not cut away and make his escape, while we're searching through the house." Whereupon he locked the door.—

"Now let us go in search of him," he added, but he was stopped by Maurice taking hold of his arm; who, with a mingled air of simplicity and roguery, that was peculiar to him, said: "Dear Fanfulle! I think something.—If Messer Droile shall ever get out, he do much harm to my master, now that those Palleschan swine hafe the victory. I hafe tought of goot remety. We hang Messer Droile as he is a wicked beast—and poor Michel, let him go—he can do no hurt."

Fanfulla laughed heartily, and replied; "To be sure, better remedy than this there cannot be;—I never thought you so good at inventions. But to tell you my mind, I never yet performed the part of an executioner, and I have no intention of beginning now."

"In my country, dear Fanfulle, it no tought bad.—Executioners, after cutting off a hundred heads, pecome of noble rank."

"A very excellent law, but it's not in use with us.—And to say truly, I have no mind to be dubbed a knight on such terms."

"Fanfulle, you hafe only to pe quiet—and keep out of the way—leave it all to Maurice—"

Fanfulla hesitated a minute or two. He could not make up his mind to such a course, as he thought it a dastardly thing. On the other hand, he thought how well that infamous wretch deserved death; and, more than all, the danger of leaving him alive, now that in addition to his will to injure them, was added, owing to the triumph of the Palleschi, the power also. At last he said to himself:—it's one traitor less, and that's no great harm;—provided I have no hand in it;—and as he mounted the stairs, sword in hand, to go in search of Michel, he said to Maurice: "Well, I'm going to unnest this other fellow;—do you, as you think proper.—I don't wish to have any hand in it—nor will I—and I don't say to you either yes or no."

And taking the lantern, which they had forgotten, and had left still burning on the stairs, he went up, whistling to himself, and not sorry to think he had met with a fellow, who without being withheld by the meanness of such an enterprise, was about to rid the world of so foul a wretch, and relieve the oppressed Lapi family from so determined a persecutor.

Maurice too, not sorry to avenge his master, and to take such an enemy out of his path, went to the chamber, in which Troilus was still storming and raving, and uttering blasphemies to such a degree, as almost to bring down the place about his ears.

When he heard the latch of the door move, thinking it was Michel, he exclaimed, all foaming with rage: "You have come at last, have you, vile knave! Let me loose, or I'll—"

But just then the door opened, and instead of Michel, he saw the Swiss enter, with such an expression on his countenance, that the very sight made him shudder. Maurice too (although for a very different reason) felt himself start at the sight of that wretch.

Fear and rage, his long continued writhings, with the hope of succeeding at last in loosening or breaking the cords that bound him, and his unceasing and desperate cries had worked him up to that pitch, that he looked more like a fury than a human being. If any one wanted to imagine the appearance of a soul condemned to eternal torments, he would only have to draw the picture he presented; his whole aspect was hideous; his face red, and almost black, dripping with sweat, and moistened with tears of rage—in fact, he was terrible to look at; and Maurice felt such a mingled sensation of horror and detestation, that he determined as soon as possible to rid himself of him.

Spying the trap-door which had been left open, a new thought struck him. He went to the aperture, and by shaking the rope to and fro, he found, that the hole was very deep. He began to draw the rope up; he went on pulling and pulling, he thought he should never come to the end. Troilus, all the time, was in a state of indescribable horror and alarm, at seeing the fate that was designed for him; he began to intreat, to implore, and to utter the most vehement protestations; he bent his knees, as well as his fetters would allow him; and soon, becoming almost distracted with terror, he uttered the most horrible things, quite incoherent and unintelligible; he howled and shrieked; but Maurice kept drawing up the rope, only saying from time to time: "Messer Droile, you make act of contrition—you teserve to die in the va'ter!"

At last the end of the rope appeared, to which was fastened a well-hook, all rust and dirt. Troilus was in a state of utter prostration; his head fell forward, and his strength seemed quite exhausted; but unhappily for him his senses still remained.

Maurice very speedily (for he was anxious to make an end of the matter, and, indeed, so are we) bound the rope round him just under the arm-pits, and cutting that which tied him to the bed-post, he raised him up in his arms and placed him over the hole, which was just large enough to admit him.

The wretched man struggled to save himself, but in vain, and being fastened to the cord, he was quickly let down by Maurice and landed at the bottom. Maurice then unfastened the rope from the pulley, and cast it down after him; and then pitching his cap, which lay upon the ground, after him also, he shut the doors that formed the lid. Returning to the courtyard to wait for Fanfulla, he knelt down, and with what devotion he could call up, said a *Miserere* for the soul of Troilus; who, in all probability, found not so speedy a death down below, but that he had time for many reflections, which we may leave to our reader's imagination to follow out.

Fanfulla's conjectures about Troilus's servant proved to be correct. Exhausted by the watchings and labours of the last few days, he had gone to seek upstairs, in a distant part of the mansion, for some retired room; where throwing himself on the bed, he fell so soundly asleep that the roar of artillery would not have disturbed him.

Fanfulla, coming to the foot of the stairs, heard his loud snoring a long way off; and guided by the sound, he soon lighted on him. He gently plucked his beard, upon which Michel started up affrighted; and the first object that met his eyes, was the point of a sword gleaming at his chest. There was no help for him, and therefore, without attempting to stir or to defend himself, he begged his life, for God's sake; which was granted him on condition that he should follow, or to speak more correctly, that he should precede his captor; who keeping close to his heels, bade him make his way to the courtyard.

"Hollo! what are you doing there on your knees?" exclaimed Fanfulla, not a little astonished at seeing Maurice at such a time so engaged.

"Me make a leetle tefotion for te soul of poor Messer Droile," replied he in an under tone, lest Michel should hear and guess what had occurred.

"Well, no one can say that you have not a tender heart—but now let us be gone, in God's name."

And tying Michel's hands together by means of a rope, which was afterwards fastened round one of his legs, to prevent his running away from them, they all set off together, and directed their steps towards Montemurlo.

"Well, and how has the matter fared?" asked Fanfulla, who was most anxious to know how that wretched villain had been made an end of.

"I'll tell thee, goot Fanfulle!—but first swear, you no say noting to my master!—To pe sure, you pe a shentleman!—me den vill hafe te oath of a shentleman—"

"Never fear, my good man; for were I what you say, still 'twere better I should swear to you on the faith of an honest man; for, as for gentlemen, many of them are found to break their word; but of honest men and true, ne'er a one—and I, as being one of these latter, give you my plighted word, that I'll tell no living creature."

"Well then, me is satisfied, goot Fanfulle! Messer Droile no hang at all. I tought to save time, and distance too, in his going down to te tevil, having let him down, down, down—then trow his cap too after him,—so to-morrow he no more pe found—they tink him go away—and no one suspect noting."

"A good idea truly!" exclaimed Fanfulla; and going along at a good pace, they soon reached the parish of Montemurlo, where their companions had already arrived, and where Laodamia, who was somewhat worse for her journey, had at least found a bed, on which to rest her exhausted frame, and all the comforts and advantages of a cordial and hearty hospitality.

But to describe completely the misfortunes that lighted on the Lapi family, we must once more return to Niccolo, whom we left on the road to Florence.

Poor Florence! We have been essaying to recount, to the best of our abilities, the sorrows and troubles of a single one of thy families; and then to think, that a thousand others suffered as bad, or worse! How many wives were made widows! how many children became orphans, and were left alone on the wide world! How many aged parents, bereft of their children, had to drag out the last years of their lives in sorrow and in solitude! How many noble and generous hearts, worn out by the long miseries of exile, were crushed—and forgotten! To think, too, what a noxious plant flourished, and spread its roots among thy ruins! what deadly and poisonous fruits it produced to succeeding generations; who were born, and who died, inglorious and unhonoured, beneath its pestilential shade!

Oh! but we must bear one thing in mind, and that will reconcile us to all this misery,—will show us that the sufferings of a whole people were not thrown away, but served the most important ends. They served to establish firmly the power of Charles V. in Italy, to maintain him in possession of Lombardy, which was thus enabled, during a period of 200 years, to repose peacefully in the arms of Spain;—they served to procure, during the same period, for the Neapolitans, the just and benevolent protection of a Spanish viceroy;—they served for this purpose, too, that the Imperial soldiers, without being obliged to have one eye over their shoulder to guard their rear, could accept invitations to the tables of the French, and batten on the spoils of the provençal burghers and country people;—they served, in a word, many good and useful objects; and could the Florentines have foreseen them, one may conjecture, whether or no, it would have served to reconcile them to their fate. But unluckily they were not prophets.

CHAPTER X.

The clock had struck ten, when Niccolo stopped that night, in the custody of his escort, at the closed gates of the porte al Prato. The sentinel on guard cried out the usual *Who goes there?* in German; in the same language too he called to his captain, who, upon making his appearance, began a dialogue in bad Italian with Signor Benedetto; and, not without considerable difficulty, at last made out, that these were the people, to whom Malatesta had ordered them to open the gates, at whatever hour they arrived.

The gate, after a while, slowly opened; and having entered, they passed through the midst of a body of landsknechts, and directed their way to the district of All Saints.

During the whole ninety years of his life, this had been the first time, that Niccolo had ever heard soldiers on guard, at the gates of Florence, speak a barbarous and foreign language. Had his hands have been free, his ears would never have been exposed to hear such a sound, which made him start convulsively, as the slave does at a sudden and painful wrench of his chain.

They passed on through dark streets, all silent and deserted, which imparted to Florence an appearance, similar to that which perhaps belonged to the Necropolis of the Egyptians, the city of tombs. Arriving at the public square, Niccolo could distinguish the gate of the palace, its steps, and its tribune, where the affairs of state were wont to be discussed, all occupied by foreign soldiers, who were lying about asleep. This herd of Spanish and German troops were snoring, outstretched on the bare earth, in a thousand different and strange postures. The tramp of the horses did not wake a single one of them; and so, traversing the square, they at last reached the gate of the Bargello.

Here too they had to wake up the people inside. Presently they heard a bustling sound in the guard-room of the keepers, which was placed on one side of the gate, as you entered; then a rattling of keys, a drawing of bolts, and at last the creaking of the hinges, on which the ponderous gate slowly turned.

Niccolo having dismounted was led in, and delivered over to the sheriff; who had come in person to receive him. After this ceremony, the escort and Benedetto withdrew, the gates were closed, and the bolts shot again into their staples.

Niccolo looked round, and not seeing any of those, who had been taken with him, derived some consolation from this circumstance. But yet he was anxious about his daughters, and longed to know what had become of them. He made the most pressing inquiries of those about him; but he got no reply. The poor old man knew well the nature of those with whom he had to deal, and therefore did not repeat them.

This aged and venerable citizen of the republic, the noblest and most generous soul there was in all Florence, now saw himself in the power of that ignoble and degraded race of beings (who are unchangeably the same, under every diversity of government) whose business it is, to keep their fellow-creatures in confinement, to torment them, and at last to hand them over to the executioner; and who regard their office not only as one means of subsistence, but often as that which is preferable to all others. In the eyes of these people, the man who has once stepped over the fatal threshold of the gaol, whether innocent or guilty, whether the fell assassin or the involuntary homicide, whether he have the brand of a parricide, or his soul be unspotted by a single crime, it's all one to them; he is a prisoner, and that's all they either know or care. Whether he laughs or weeps, whether he raves or is resigned, it matters nothing to them.—Doth the mastiff care, who is urged on by the butcher to stop a fugitive lamb, whether it will feel the pain of his tusks, when he grasps it by the ear?—

And yet these people, to whom an insensibility to pity is almost a necessary condition of existence, felt shocked at the sight of this majestic and venerable old man; if it were not pity, it was at least surprise, to think that papal vengeance could go to such extremities.

" It was certainly worth while," said one, " to take all this trouble to cage such a bird as this!—he was not likely to fly far at all events."

In the meanwhile they searched Niccolo from head to foot, to see if he had any arms concealed about him. Feeling in his pockets, they took from him the few coins they found there, and gave them up to the sheriff. The clerk took down the prisoner's name, and the hour when he was brought to the prison; they then led him upstairs, by the staircase which still stands on the right-hand side of the courtyard.

Had Niccolo, as he mounted the steps, but cast his eyes down below, he would probably have seen in the middle of the pavement, a square massive block, on which lay an axe; the stones all around it were besmeared with large dark spots, from which was reflected the flaring light of the torch, that was borne before him by one of the gaolers; and he might, perhaps, have guessed whose blood it was, that the dogs could now lick, but which a few hours ago was running in the veins of the last gonfalonier, but one, of the republic.

But the horrid spectacle did not meet Niccolo's eyes; for he was looking upward, at one moment fixing his gaze on the stone lion, that adorns the parapet of the steps; at another, on the walls and the sculptured shields, with which they are covered; and as he thought of the brave men to whom they belonged, as he thought of the ancient glory of Florence, he felt his strength and courage revive, and determined to render it the last homage, that was now in his power, that of showing himself, at this crisis, truly worthy of being her son.

He ascended the stairs therefore with a tired, but not unsteady step; his brow was grave, but confident and serene; and on reaching the landing, he was conducted, through a long passage, to a low and narrow door; which, upon the gaoler opening, he had to enter in a stooping attitude. It led into a cell about six yards square; in which, by means of a hole near the ceiling, you could catch a glimpse of the sky, through the bars of a strong iron grating. There was a small bed, with a straw mattress, which still preserved the impress of the very first person who had ever slept on it. On the ground stood a pitcher.

"See, if there's any water," said the gaoler to one of his attendants. He looked, and replied that the pitcher was full. "Carduccio," he said, "couldn't have been very thirsty, for he hasn't touched it."

Niccolo started at the sound of that name, and anxiously asked: "Was he then here?"

"He was."

"And where have they put him now?"

"Where he will be, when they come to fetch him at the day of judgment."

After this, the gaoler and his satellites went out, and closing the door with a clattering of bolts and keys, they left the old man in the dark. Standing up in the midst of his cell, he raised his hands in an attitude of supplication, and exclaimed:

"O Carduccio! thou hast consummated thy sacrifice. May God grant his peace to thy brave and glorious spirit." Then groping about, he found his bed, and sat down on it; and taking up the pitcher, he drank a few draughts; and determined, if possible, to compose himself to sleep, in order to recruit his strength, as well as he could.

"So that this my decrepit frame, this worn out tabernacle, may not fail me in my last moments! Help me, O God, in the trial that awaits me. Thou seest my heart, and seest also to what these feeble and exhausted limbs are about to be subjected; pour into them such strength, as may support them to traverse, without any act of unworthy meanness, the few remaining steps that separate me from the tomb."

He stretched himself on his pallet, and composing himself to sleep, lay still in order to court its approach. But how was it possible, that a mind teeming with a thousand anxious thoughts, that a heart so full of ardent feelings, could lull itself to rest? The serenity of a guiltless conscience, is not always enough to produce this effect, nor does wakefulness arise only from remorse. How was it possible, when he now found himself at the close of a long and troubled life, abounding in so many vicissitudes, and spent entirely in the absorbing thought of his country's welfare, but that there should crowd in upon his recollection, in long array, all the events of so many years, the miscarriages, the imprudent measures, all the circumstances in fact, by which after such persevering efforts, after so many struggles and the shedding of so much blood, Florence had, notwithstanding, fallen beneath the talons of the Medici, and himself reduced—to what? to make a last and useless sacrifice of a few hours of life!—

And could not all this long-suffering, all these miseries and misfortunes, obtain a different result from the Eternal Justice? Could it ever have allowed, that the wicked should triumph over the good, in spite of their unshaken perseverance in fighting, in enduring, and in entreating the Divine aid? in spite of the promises of father Jerome, God's own prophet?—What a tremendous judgment! thought the aged sufferer, what an inscrutable mystery of the Divine anger!—And what, O God, was our aim? he argued, in the bitterness of his heart. What our most ardent desires? Were they not to establish thy kingdom? to increase the glory of thy name? to save our country from the hands of our enemies? of those who, in order to keep their foot more securely on the neck of this people, can effect their object in no other way, but by corrupting and debauching their minds with every species of vice?—Oh! how have I suffered, how have I prayed! How readily did I give up to thee, O my God, the lives of my children! with what joy, would I have offered up to Thee that of the only one, that remains to me!—I could have looked with unmoved eyes on the utter ruin of my poor family—but Florence!—

O gracious God!—why hast Thou not saved Florence?—

These sad thoughts, as they passed through Niccolo's mind, who could not, in spite of his iron temperament, but succumb beneath the long watchings, the fatigues and mental agitations, which he had undergone, were leading him unconsciously towards a train of ideas still more gloomy and distressing, the cause of which was, indeed, the decay of his vital powers. His faith in the justice and goodness of God—his faith in father Jerome's promises, which, like a ray of heavenly light, had been for so many years his guide and support, this he saw all at once overclouded and vanishing into mist and darkness, full of doubts and fears.—What if in all my hopes—in all my belief during these ninety years, I have been deceived!—

This tremendous suspicion rose up in his troubled soul just at the moment, when he most needed to find in his faith, the support and comfort of the hope that is incorruptible. He felt a cold chill pervade his frame (actually and not figuratively), as he saw the last tie about to be severed, to which he could still cling; just as the man feels his blood curdle, who, suspended by a strong bough over a deep abyss, all on a sudden hears it crack, and feels it giving way; or as he who in a ship, lashed by wind and waves close to some rugged rock, sees the cable parting that holds their last anchor.

A bitter groan issued from Niccolo's bosom, when, notwithstanding his endeavours to close the door of his heart against these despairing thoughts, he felt that they forced their way in, terrible and overwhelming, just as the enemy rush in crowds into a fortress, that has been long defended and attacked in vain. For the first time in ninety years, did he feel what fear was; for he seemed to see the hopes of a whole life, both with regard to this world and the next, all shattered in a moment; as he vainly sought, either in the present or the future, for any prospect, on which his mind could dwell with hope, any thought unclouded with darkness and with doubt; and sitting up on his bed he exclaimed, as he raised his hands to heaven: "*Deus meus, quare dereliquisti me?*"

It seems to have been designed in the person of Niccolo, to furnish an example to the world, of the extent to which human suffering can be carried, and yet for man not to be overcome by it, but to overcome. With that tremendous force of will, which had ever been his most prominent characteristic, he made an effort to chase away these thoughts, and he succeeded; he strove to fill his mind with ideas of a totally opposite kind, and in this too he succeeded; he placed the curb upon his unbridled thoughts and imaginations, and said within himself:—Who am I, that I should presume to judge the Being, who made me and all mankind; who made the earth, the sky, the universe! To say that He cannot, or will not, or does not care to occupy himself with the interests of any, even the least, of his creatures, to weigh his merits and demerits, his joys and griefs, because He is too great to condescend to aught so lowly;—what impious folly! Is it not to limit his power, even to think of reducing him, to the level of our puny capacity? Are not all created things but atoms, and less than nothing, when compared with his infinity? To make the sun and the stars revolve in the firmament, does it require more at his hand, than to give form and motion to the meanest insect, that crawls? O great God, since then thou hast created me, let thy providence too watch over me! Succour and sustain this immortal spirit, now that it is about to return to the place from whence it came! Pardon the doubts of this feeble intellect, for *it* too is thy creation? Thou hast not vouchsafed to it, that it should comprehend Thee; but this I feel, that thou hast placed in my heart, that which makes up for all the ills of my condition, in giving me sufficient knowledge and virtue, to enable me to hope in thee, and to trust in thy mercy. Yes, O my God, I do hope—I do trust in thy goodness; I throw myself into thy almighty arms, into thy fatherly bosom, where I shall, perhaps, one day learn and understand, why I have suffered so much here below!"

With these reflections, hope, the celestial comforter of the sorrowing and afflicted, descended into the heart of the poor old man, and diffused over it a sweetness, it had never experienced before, a quiet serenity, that entirely restored him to himself. He felt his spirit transported into a higher region, and one far away from the miseries of this world of ours ; he now felt himself set free from its agitations, and its cares, and entirely absorbed with the ideas and feelings of a better life. These thoughts, by slow degrees, became insensibly mingled and blended together, without losing any of their ecstatic sweetness ; and soon they began to shade off into the fantasies of the imagination, for wearied and worn out, Niccolo had, at last, sunk to sleep ; when he seemed to behold before him three human forms, clad in white robes, with bare feet, who smiled on him, and who appeared to be encompassed with a crimson halo of brilliant light, which with its lambent motions, and its thousand quivering tongues of flame, surrounded them on all sides.

The middle one of these three forms began to speak to him ; but his words were like a pleasant harmony, altogether unlike any terrestrial language, and incomprehensible by Niccolo, who seemed, upon recognising him as Father Jerome, to prostrate himself before him, exclaiming : " O most venerable of martyrs, grant that thy servant may understand thee !"

The friar, thereupon, changing the language in which he spoke, said to him :

" Wouldst thou understand the mysteries of God ? Adore, and hope.—My prophecies will yet be fulfilled: *Florentia post flagella renovabitur.* But thou canst not know, either what the scourge is to be, or how long it is destined to last—*sic dicit Dominus*—ages and generations shall pass away; and then there shall be a new light and a new land; and that country, which we have both loved so much, shall rise again liberated and restored."

The flames, the martyrs, the vision, all vanished; and Niccolo on his awaking, thinking his dream could be nothing less than a divine vision, which, with supernatural manifestations, had represented to his mind those ideas, which were ever present to his heart, felt his bosom glow, more ardently than ever, with that intense patriotism, that unshaken faith, which had been the breath of his life, and which in death was to be his only support. Heaven, who never abandons any man except for his own fault, had sent him aid, just when he most needed it.

In the adjoining passage, there was presently heard the sound of footsteps and the clanking of keys; the door of his chamber opened, and an officer entered, with a torch in his hand, followed by some of the sheriffs' men, and directed the old man to get up, and follow them. He obeyed; and they all went out, Niccolo walking in the middle; and after a long traversing of corridors and staircases, they reached the door of a hall, where sat the abominable tribunal, that had been constituted, not of course to judge, but, with the mockery of a trial, to hand over to the executioner the enemies of the new government.

It was a spacious and lofty room; the walls of which were adorned with an historic painting by the hand of Giotto, abounding in figures of saints; and in their persons the painter had introduced the portraits of several of the most distinguished citizens of his time; in this number were Corso Donati, Brunetto Latini, and Dante Alighieri.

Under Pietro Leopoldo, this picture was coated with whitewash. In our days, the prisoners having, with their nails, scraped away this covering, have brought parts of it to light. It is to be hoped, that it will be entirely cleansed and restored, and that a spot, which teems with so many glorious recollections, will be rendered more sightly than it is at present.

Beneath this picture was a bench, on which sat the judges, eight in number, in their purple robes; and in front of them was a long table, on which were registers, documents, ink-horns, a bundle, and four candlesticks, with wax tapers burning in them; for it was not yet light; and through two narrow windows, high up from the ground, on the left as you entered, and, just then, set open on account of the heat, you could see the stars twinkling through the bars of the iron grating.

Near the door, macebearers, sheriffs' officers, witnesses, and messengers were talking together. In one corner, projecting from the wall, was a beam, with a pulley at the top, and the cord that was used for the torture. An image of Our Lady painted on the wall at the side, with a lamp burning before it, was probably intended to support the victims by the sight of it; or rather, was placed there in conformity with the ancient usage, of abusing divine things to give a countenance to human iniquities.

As the old man entered, there arose a slight murmur among the ferocious looking fellows at the door. Some were lying down, extended at full length by the wall; for at that time the tribunal had not a moment's repose. One of them, stretching and yawning, quite wearied out, exclaimed: "When will the last of these foul birds be uncaged? so that we may get away, and have an hour's sleep?—"

Niccolo, advancing forward, stopped at the distance of two paces from the table. Though his feelings were such as may easily be imagined, yet, as he felt that, in the presence of these his country's enemies, he was charged with maintaining her honour by his deportment and language, he stood as erect as possible; and as he cast his eye round, not haughtily indeed, but fearlessly, on his judges, no one could sustain his searching glance; and all either dropped their eyes, or turned them away.

They had been selected from among the most devoted partisans of the Medici; or rather, from among that ancient and abject race of beings which, since the world began, has ever been found ready to proffer its vile services to the victorious and dominant party.

Amongst them was Baccio Valori (Heaven bless thy hands, Cosimo de Medici!); Benedetto de Nobili was also there; of the rest there is no occasion to speak.

The President, turning to the accused, asked him his name, age, and country.

To which Niccolo replied with a firm voice: "Niccolo di ser Cione de Lapi, of the district of St. John, gonfalon of the Golden Lion; four score and eleven years old."

"Signor Benedetto, read the indictment."

Benedetto de Nobili got up, and taking a document from the table, read with an air of apparent emotion the following words:—

"*In nomine D.J.C., ac Beatiss. V. Mariæ. Amen.*" (And here the hypocrite bent his head as low as the table which was before him). "This "— day of August, 1530, there was brought "before their Excellencies, the eight Commis- "sioners of the Tribunal of the City and Repub- "lic of Florence, Niccolo di Cione de Lapi, and "accused, as the subscribed witnesses do depose, "of having:

"First. Incited and deluded the people by "fradulent devices and treasonable practices, to "the detriment and dishonour of this lawful "Government, by introducing himself *clam, seu* "*palam,* into the conferences and deliberations of "the magistrates, to oppose and gainsay that the

" said City and Republic of Florence should sub-" mit to the just and honourable conditions re-" quired by Pope Clement VII., on behalf of the " most mighty and illustrious house of the Medici, " and the Palleschan citizens who have been pro-" claimed outlaws since the year 1527 ; and having " been the prime cause, wherefore this war hath " been prolonged with infinite damage to this city " and the surrounding country.

" Secondly. *Item*. Of having counselled and " abetted the scheme of plundering the churches, " chapels, holy places, and oratories of their gold, " silver, gems, and costly furniture, contrary to " the express prohibition of his Holiness, and to " the grievous damage of the ecclesiastics, convents, " and the Holy Catholic Church, to support the " expenses of the war and this abominable rebel-" lion, against the ancient laws and statutes of the " Republic of Florence and against the Roman " Church.

" Thirdly. *Item*. Of having counselled and ex-" horted many bad men to the plundering, burn-" ing, and demolishing of the country-houses of " Careggi and others, the property of the most " illustrious house of the Medici, and to insult " and mutilate the figure of Pope Clement at " Servi, and other vile and wicked deeds.*

" Fourthly. *Item*. Of having practised in his

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* There was at the church de Servi a figure of Clement VII. suspended to the roof, similar to those we found in St. Jerome's Cave, (vol. ii. ch. 8.) Some youths had hacked it to pieces.

“ house, impious and profane rites to the memory “ of father Hierome Savonarola, who was burnt “ in front of the palace, as an obstinate heretic, “ and excommunicated by Pope Alexander VI., “ as appeareth from the tunic and ashes of the “ aforesaid father, which are here produced, and “ have been had in reverence and preserved by “ the aforesaid Niccolo in his house, in his own “ bed-chamber, to make thereunto his devotions, “ to the scandal of his household and of all good “ Christians; and with disobedience to the Holy “ Roman Church.

“ Of which charges, being admonished to speak “ the truth, and having taken their oaths thereto “ upon the holy Gospels, there follow the underwritten witnesses—”

And here he read a string of names of the lowest of the populace, followed by their mark, as not one of them could write; after which he added:

“ For which and other crimes and delinquencies, “ which are here pretermitted, but which, if need “ were, could be proven, your Excellencies, the “ Commissioners of the Tribunal of the City and “ Republic of Florence, are requested to decree “ judgment against the aforesaid Niccolo de Lapi, “ by awarding the punishment due to traitors, for “ the protection of well-disposed citizens and the “ maintenance of the laws, as well as for an “ example to the wicked and evil-disposed. *Ad* “ *Dei gloriam. Amen.*”

During the reading of this document, a bitter smile more than once curled the old man's lip. When it was ended, the president said: "Niccolo, hast thou heard; dost thou confess, or dost thou wish to speak in thy defence?"

"In my defence?" replied the old man, with a smile; "I would not waste words and breath for such a purpose. Don't I know you? Don't I know who has appointed you to this duty? who has caused me to be apprehended and dragged to prison, contrary to the express conditions of the surrender, which stipulated for the lives and liberty of the inhabitants? And would you have me think of defending myself? No, I speak not with any view of saving my head; let it fall, I say; and, would to God, it had fallen before now! I had not then witnessed the downfall of my venerated, but unhappy, country; nor so many acts of treachery, and so many deeds of dishonour! But I speak for the honour of Florence; for never, so long at all events as my tongue is free, and whilst I am suffered to live, never will I hear this betrayed and injured people slandered and calumniated, without raising my voice in their defence.

"I have neither incited nor deluded them, by treasonable practices; nor have I disturbed the deliberations and conferences of the magistrates; but in their homes, in the church, in the market-place, everywhere, but openly (for Niccolo has never either spoken or acted otherwise) I have encouraged them to the defence of their liberty;

and I'm proud of having done so; for Florence has ever been free and independent, whilst the Medici and their abettors, with their artifices and machinations, have aimed at subjugating it; and if they were driven out of the city, it was but their deserts. And now they are come back, with iron heel to trample it under foot; God has permitted it; but the infamy that belongs to traitors, will brand *them*, and not *us*, to all eternity.

" The gold and silver vessels of the churches were made use of, and we had authority for doing so, from the Pope himself; who had given his permission for it, before the year '27, when it was in defence of the Medicean government. Either, then, it is not lawful, to divert those treasures to profane uses; and, in that case, neither then was it right to place them at the disposal of the laity; or, it is lawful, and they were used for a righteous object, to relieve misery and suffering, and to save the lives of thousands of innocent people, who were perishing of want.

" Of the burning of the country-houses of Careggi, I shall not say one word; as it belongs only to my own personal defence; and that is a point on which I am indifferent. But I declare, and protest in the face of God and of the world, and raise my voice against the slanderous blasphemies, that I have been obliged to listen to against the holy martyr, father Jerome Savonarola, whom you are not satisfied with having put to death, and thrown his ashes into the Arno, but you must vilify his memory with your calumnies. And do you imagine that you have succeeded in your object? that all men are not fully aware of the vile arts, the frauds, the false accusations, by which you compassed his ruin; you Palleschi, whom his virtues and pious denunciations overwhelmed with shame? do you imagine, any one is ignorant of the falsification of the legal process? and how too, Signor Ceccone, the notary, who was the instrument for carrying out those abominable acts of injustice, died by the just visitation of God, in the frenzy of despair? And can an excommunication, that is based on falsehood and calumny, stand good?—I did not render any undue reverence to this holy martyr's relics; but I preserved them in my house, with that respect, which was due to the ashes of a saint, who had been declared to be such, by miracles, wrought during his life and after his death."

Benedetto, at these words, undid the bundle that lay on the table, took out the friar's robe, and a silk bag, quilted with gold, which contained the ashes, and showing them to Niccolo, said: "It sufficeth that you recognise these things, as belonging to you, and as being the same, which you had in your room in a recess, with a lamp burning before them; what is the inference to be drawn from these rites, and what the validity of the excommunication, that is a question for us."

"Yes, I do recognise them, and they are mine," said Niccolo, taking them in his hands and kissing them with ardent veneration; "and I thank God, for granting me the opportunity of openly confessing his prophet, in the face of you his enemies! and of confessing my country, in the face of you, who have ruined and foully betrayed it!—Who was I, a poor insignificant old man, that I should be thought worthy to die in so holy and honourable a cause?—Now do your worst; let the powers of darkness triumph; but know this, that Niccolo, alone and unprotected, and a prisoner in the midst of you, feels pity for you, and that it will be your lot one day to envy him. I say to thee, Baccio Valori," he exclaimed, raising his voice and pointing his finger towards him, whilst Baccio, half terrified, shook in his seat: "I say to thee! the day will come, when thou wilt envy the death of Niccolo. It is not, that I imprecate any evil on thee, for what thou art now doing to me, for I freely pardon thee; but God does not pardon the man, who does to his country what thou hast done!"

"How now!" said Baccio interrupting him, and making a hurried sign to the macebearers, "is this the respect you show to the authorities of the State?" And the president also signalling to the officers of the court, said: "Since he will not adopt a reasonable course, but instead thereof reviles his judges, it behoveth to put him to the torture. Thou hast no one to blame but thyself, Niccolo! Clerk, take down his examination.—"

Thereupon some of the officials seizing Niccolo, dragged him violently towards the horrible instrument, which we have already alluded to; and stripping off his lucco, and his hood, they threw them on the ground; so that the venerable old man remained only in his hose and shirt. The silver crucifix, that he had taken from the head of the bed, when he last left his home, and which had belonged to his wife Flora, hung at his breast, and attracted the eyes of the ruffians, who quickly divested him of it. At this the old man uttered a sorrowful sigh, but he raised his eyes to heaven with calm resignation, and his lips muttered some broken sentences of prayer,—or it might be, of pardon.

In the meantime the executioner's satellites, clad in doublets and hose of a deep red colour, with their sleeves turned up as far as their elbow, had forced the old man beneath the pulley, and tied his arms at the wrists, tightly behind his back, with the cord that hung from it. Three of them taking hold of the other end of the rope, awaited, with unfeeling indifference, the signal to begin; and Niccolo, turning his thoughts to God, and imploring the intercession of Father Jerome, said: "O thou, who sufferedst so much in the cause of truth and justice, enable me to suffer this light affliction, for the glory of God, and the honour of this poor country."

Benedetto, meanwhile, had risen from his place, and, approaching the victim, had stationed himself right in front of him, by the side of a small table, at which sat the clerk, with a piece of white paper, and his pen in his hand, waiting to write down his confession.

Many painters in representing the martyrdom of some saint, have aimed at rendering the scene more striking and affecting by a marked contrast between the executioner's ferocious aspect, and the meek countenance of the martyr; but none could ever have realized an adequate conception of Niccolo's, on the present occasion. The old man's face, which, owing to its extreme paleness, was nearly of the same colour as his beard and hair, illuminated by the lamp which was burning before the Madonna that was over his head, would have had the appearance of marble or of alabaster, and might have been taken for the face of a prophet carved by Michel Angelo, had not his dark eyes, looking up to heaven, have given life to his countenance, as they glistened with a liquid brightness, amid the otherwise unvaried paleness that overspread his features; and which, though with a rapt expression as if wholly absorbed in God, were not entirely robbed of their wonted fire. The whiteness of his shirt in like manner, and of his chest, which was large and well formed, though somewhat shrunk,—in a word, his whole figure seemed invested with a kind of halo, seemed to be like a luminous body reflecting its light on the dark ground, which was formed by the sombre walls of the apartment, the filthy garments of the crowd of officials, and their foul and hideous aspects;

some red and blotchy from excessive drinking, others pale and haggard from their unbridled licentiousness, and others again dark and brutalized by their habitual and sanguinary violence. Nor less degraded and revolting, though somewhat less coarse in his exterior, appeared Benedetto de Nobili.—Indeed what is baser and more degraded than a hypocrite's countenance?

Feigning a sigh, and casting down his eyes with an air of pity, he said: "Niccolo, dost thou confess to having beguiled and misled the people, as appears from the charge and from the evidence of the witnesses?"

The old man made no reply, and began to recite the verse, *Domine, adjutor meus*, &c.

Nobili gave the executioners a sign; upon which, twisting the rope more tightly round his hands, they caused his knees to bend, so that he sustained the whole weight of his body. The arms of the victim were dragged upward behind his back, and the muscles of the breast, violently distended, displayed the hollows between his ribs; his feet were lifted from off the ground, and remaining suspended for a moment, he writhed with contracted eyebrows and compressed lips, but without uttering a groan. Having been kept in this position for a few seconds, he was let down again.—But we cannot pursue these atrocious cruelties any further;—cruelties to which, for many ages, so many unhappy victims were subjected; and of which, whether the folly or the barbarity was the greatest, it would be hard to determine. Suffice it to say, that this innocent old man suffered the cord three times; and the strength of his resolution prevailed so far over nature, that he did not gratify his enemies with a single groan; and at last, languid and sinking with pain, but firm and unflinching to the last, he was carried, rather than led back to his dungeon.

CHAPTER XI.

When Niccolo was left, it may truly be said, but half alive, on the filthy pallet that served him for a bed, it had been daylight for about an hour. He remained in the same posture in which they had left him; for his exhausted and shattered frame was now become a mere motionless trunk; and even if he had had the strength to move, the slightest motion would have rendered the severe pains, which afflicted him, insupportable, in consequence of the torture he had undergone. But not even his sufferings could subdue his spirit, which had been reanimated by the celestial vision, that, he believed, he had enjoyed in his dream, and the thought, that he was now fast approaching the end of his miseries.

To the silence of night had succeeded that confused hum and bustle, which one hears in a city, newly waking to its daily toil; and which penetrated even into his cell, through the small and lofty window, that was well defended with a close iron grating. Amid all this noise and din, which arose from a confusion of human voices, and of distant sounds, such as of rolling carts, the tramp of horses, and the knocking and hammering that was going on in the various hives of human toil, Niccolo fancied he could hear from time to time, persons talking in a louder tone; it seemed as if they were hurrying past in crowds beneath the prison walls, and once he thought there was a commotion in the streets, accompanied with the hateful cry—Palle, Palle!—The Medici for ever!—Death to the Piagnoni! shouted aloud by all the vilest rabble of the city; above which was heard some stentorian voice giving the word of command in German or Spanish; for all the streets in the vicinity were, from their distrust of the people, lined with foreign troops.

"Oh why have I lived to see this day!" exclaimed Niccolo, with a sigh; "why was not I too in that last battle, in which my sons fell?—I had then died with them, and been happy!" And making an attempt to raise his arms, he succeeded, notwithstanding the pains in his back and shoulders, in stopping his ears with his fingers.

His desire for death now became stronger and stronger; and well knowing the nature of legal processes for political offences, which, in those times, by whatever party they were instituted, were despatched with the utmost expedition, he began to reckon the hours he would have to spend in this state of agony, and thought to himself, as being no slight comfort:—"It 's not possible I should be alive to-morrow morning."—At that moment a thought struck him:—"Shall I be allowed a confessor who does not belong to this traitorous government?" — He was wondering whether they would permit him to have one of the friars of St. Mark's, instead of one of those who were opposed to Father Jerome, and to the popular government; as the friars of Santa Croce, for instance, were; and thereupon he argued:—" Our good friends will be closely confined to their convent, as suspected persons, and would probably run great risk in leaving it; should I, then, expose them to such danger, by summoning them here? Father Benedict, whom I should certainly prefer, would he venture to come? He is a holy man, it is true, but somewhat timid. And even if he did come, should I like to expose him to insult and abuse, and perhaps to worse, from this wicked party? O, Niccolo, thou oughtest to know how to die alone, without any other consolation than the memory of thy past life! Now is the time to practise the fortitude thou wert wont to preach to others, unless thou wouldst have them say of thee as Christ did of the Pharisees: *Quia oneratis homines oneribus*, &c.

At the usual hour for the prisoners' meals, about the middle of the morning, the gaoler appeared with some bread and pottage, of which the old man sparingly partook, helping himself with tolerable ease, for rest had already somewhat restored the use of his arms. After which, he once more lay down, and being left alone, turned his thoughts entirely to God; thus endeavouring to prepare himself for his approaching death.

In about an hour, he again heard the bolt of his door withdrawn, and said: "Now they're coming to announce to me my sentence of death! And now, blessed and praised be Thou, O God, who at last callest me away to Thy glorious presence!"

But instead of the man whose office it was to discharge that mournful duty, he saw Benedetto de Nobili enter; who, as soon as he had carefully closed the door, advanced, and stood right in front of the bed.

Niccolo, who knew who it was, perceiving that he assumed a very bland and gracious manner, fixed his eyes sternly upon him, as if he would read his inmost thoughts, so that the miserable hypocrite was obliged to turn away his face. Then with affected sorrow and humility, he said:

"Niccolo, I am come to visit you, as it is the duty of every Christian to comfort those who are in tribulation, as thou now art. Be assured that I am deeply distressed at your calamity, but I had not the power to shield you.—Yet, if anything could now be done to deliver you from your present position, I should be heartily glad to do it——"

Niccolo, who was not for a moment deceived into lending an ear to his protestations, said to himself:—"Now what can this fellow want with me?"—but he could not at all guess. However, he replied courteously, checking the rising indignation that the sight of this traitor awoke in his heart:

"I thank you, Benedetto, and am ready to believe your kind intentions. But I have now no other wish, than that what they do, they should do quickly; and in the meanwhile, that you and everybody else will be so good as to leave me alone, and not trouble me; for in such moments, a man requires to be with himself and God, and none else."

When he had said this, he made a motion with his hand to dismiss his visitor, and turned his face to the wall, hoping he would retire. Nobili, however, showed no intention of doing so, but began again in a still more ingratiating tone:

"You speak too positively, Niccolo! It seems as if you didn't care whether you live or die!—you give yourself up as a lost man too soon—and seem to think you have nothing but enemies about you. But such is not the case, Niccolo."

The old man, turning round, once more surveyed him with a glance so searching, that Nobili's eyes were withdrawn from him, and seemed to wander in all directions; at last he said, somewhat sternly:

"What my present position is, and with whom I have to deal, I very well know, Benedetto—and, thank God, I am glad to be as I am; for I would die not only once, but ten times, sooner than see Florence in the power of her present masters.—Now then, I tell you once more, go and leave me in peace."

Nobili seemed half inclined to go; and was silent for a moment or two; but presently, as if resuming his first determination, he said: "If I have come here, and if I trouble you, it is all for your own good. Listen to me, Niccolo;—we are here all alone; no one can hear us. That I side with the Palleschi, and you with the popular party, is of little consequence;—we are now both old;—but I remember that I have a soul to be saved, and that is of great consequence. Think you, that I do not observe the doings of this new government? and that I am not fully aware of the grievous wrong that is being done to you? You will perhaps say:—Why then were you my accuser?—How could I help obeying that villain, Baccio? And besides, what do you say,—if I, to avoid staining my hands with innocent blood, am now come to thee to save thee?"

Niccolo started at these last words; but Nobili making a sign to him with his hand, not to interrupt him, continued: "Will you hold your life so cheap, because your party was defeated? Is this the example set us by our ancestors? And if, in Florence, every time that one party was driven out and dispersed, they had done, as you are now for doing, would they ever have been restored?—Resolve to live, for no one has yet found a spoke, that can stop the wheel of fortune; it is only to the dead that there is no hope. I speak for your good, Niccolo! Consider; these men, who are bent on compassing your death, it is in your power to make your friends.—Thou art rich, Niccolo—I know that in thy house—or may be, at your farm near Poggio, thou hast much concealed treasure.—Tell me the place—it's not the time to be niggardly—money may be replaced, but life!——Tell me where thy secret hoards are; and with this money, I shall be so well able to manage, that thy enemies——"

Niccolo, who had no hidden treasures, and who at once penetrated the vile purposes, and the avaricious views of Nobili, could restrain himself no longer.

"Ah! thou traitorous thief!" he exclaimed, rising from his bed, and making a vigorous effort to sit up, "is it not enough for thee, to have robbed me of the money I lent thee, to cover thy petty acts of larceny, without your coming now that I am at the point of death, to mock me with your pretended pity, to strip me of what you think I have, but have not, and never had? What treasures?—what hidden stores?—what fancies are these? I gave, for the necessities of the city, even the small silver urn that contained the ashes of the holy father Jerome, and yet you think I have wells full of florins! Thou wert ever a villain, and wilt be one while thou livest; nor wilt thou ever understand the ways of honest men, who regard their country and liberty, more than their money or their lives. And to save my life, think you, I would owe it to a Palleschan? Once only, in ninety-one years, have I ever had to do with the Palleschans, and it has been to my sorrow; for my country would not now, perhaps, be enslaved; I, perhaps, should not be here; and I had never stained the honour of my house, had I not have received a Palleschan traitor for a son-in-law."

To find himself detected, and baffled ; to hear the stinging, but well-merited reproaches of Niccolo, called up such rancorous feelings in Nobili's breast, that in order to give them vent, and wound Niccolo's feelings somehow or other, he said: "What, not even yet does your stubborn pride forsake you?—Well, let me tell you, if you think you have no other stain upon your honour, but that of having a Palleschan for your son-in-law, you may make yourself quite easy on that point; for no Palleschan (least of all such a gentleman as Troilus) ever had an idea of marrying a daughter of such as you."

"Ho! what is that you say?"

"I had never said a word of this to you, but your foolish pride has driven me to it.—Your daughter was Troilus's concubine, and not his wife—"

And the vile wretch, exulting in the stab he thought he was about to give to the poor old man's peace, related to him the whole history of Lisa's marriage. Niccolo, who listened to him with deep attention, at first exhibited marks of surprise; then a flash of indignation passed over his brow; but at last, after a moment's reflection, resuming his grave and haughty expression of countenance, he exclaimed, to the great astonishment of Nobili, who expected to find that his words had produced just the opposite effect: "I thank God, and I thank thee, Benedetto, for what I have just heard. One thought, and one only, disturbed me in quitting life—it was, that my daughter was a traitor's wife; for I know what a wife's duty is towards her husband, be he as great a villain as he may.—But now!—she is loosed from all ties!—she is free!—she can fly from, she can loathe the man, who has been a traitor to his country, and the author of its ruin!—for of the deception he has practised towards me, I think nothing.—For, what is now the extent of my misfortune? To have suffered insulting and injurious treatment from a villain! To have been overreached by the mean and paltry artifices of a Palleschan, a coxcomb of the court! He has but been true to the ancient practices of his party!—And I have but met with, what has happened to so many honourable and worthy men But as for the infamy of this transaction, on whom does it light? on him or on me? The axe of the executioner neither stains nor takes away a man's honour! nor does the having been imposed upon, and deceived by a foul traitor! But *this* stains, *this* takes away a man's honour, to do what you have done; for you, and Troilus, and Baccio, and all you Palleschans, have worn the cloak of the greatest traitors the world ever saw!—and so long as it lasts, while the sun shall revolve, history will tell, that you Palleschans conquered, not by force and courage, but by a thousand artifices of fraud and treachery; and that we Piagnoni were crushed and borne down, not by superior strength, but by the vilest acts of treachery and deceit—"

Niccolo, who in giving utterance to these words, had risen to the highest pitch of excitement, raised his hand at the close of them, and pointed to the door, with that authoritative manner, that was usual with him in his own house, forgetting for the moment that he was in a prison. And this circumstance seemed equally to have escaped Nobili, humiliated and overwhelmed by the stern and majestic presence of the indomitable old man, and his determined manner, which overawed him and enforced compliance. Without a word of reply, without daring to raise his eyes and look at Niccolo, he turned to the door, opened it, and rushed out; and drawing the bolts, went his way, baffled and discomfited; and as it may well be imagined, burning with rage and shame.

Meanwhile the hours fled away. The sun was beginning to decline towards the west, and Niccolo was still alone in his prison, without as yet knowing anything of his fate, and without the aids and consolations, that are wont to be allowed to the condemned. But all had not forsaken him; and at this very time, there was one, who was preparing to encounter every risk to discharge the duty, which virtue, honour, and friendship enjoins on such occasions.

Where danger is talked of, the reader will perhaps hardly expect to find the name of Father Benedict, the superior of St. Mark's; he, who in the first chapter of this tale, had given such a sorry proof of his courage. And yet, he was the person who, as soon as he knew of Niccolo's trouble, resolved that no one else but himself should attend him, to offer him, in his last hours, the comforts of religion; which, he knew, would be rendered the more soothing from their long and intimate friendship. Fame, which ofttimes with such unaccountable rapidity spreads abroad the news of events, had published the fact of Troilus's treachery; and the kind-hearted priest, remembering that it was he, who had advised the receiving of Troilus into his house, felt not a little regret, when he thought to himself:—I have been the cause of his ruin!—This thought, together with that of discharging a sacred duty, and the desire of compensating, in some degree, for the misery he looked upon himself as having caused, overcame every other consideration in the heart of this simple and benevolent priest; so true is it, that virtue is the strongest and most stedfast principle in human nature! Having addressed a brief but fervent prayer to God, to help him and to infuse into his heart the strength and boldness he felt not to be inherent in him, he took his staff and went forth from his cell. He went first to the sub-prior, and informing him of his design, left all authority in his hands, in case he should not return; told him, that he and his brethren were to pray for him, and recommending the convent to his care, enjoining a rigid observance of the rules of their order, and the cultivation of mutual charity; and then, exhorting him to suffer with patience their present tribulations, he took his leave, saying: "Remember me in your prayers." The sub-prior accompanied him to the convent gate; and as they went along, some of the other friars joined them, so that upon reaching the porter's lodge, many offered, and were urgent, to accompany their superior. But he refused to allow them, and having thanked them, and saluted every one, he said: "I shall prosper, as God wills; but for many of us to go, might give offence, and be the occasion of harm and damage. Now open the gate," (he said, addressing the porter,) "and let me go, with the help of God."

The porter purposely delayed drawing the bolts and taking down the bars that secured the gate. When he was about (last of all) to turn the key, he stole a cautious glance through a small window, to see if there were any signs of danger abroad; and when, at last, he had opened the gate and Father Benedict was about to pass through, he seized his hand and kissed it, while he said to him: "You are going to do a holy work, and God's help will not be wanting to you.—I pray you tell Sir Niccolo to remember the poor gate-keeper of St. Mark's (for I too pray for him,) and when he is among the glorified spirits to pray to God for me."

Father Benedict departed, charging them to shut the gate securely. And first of all, he resolved to go to Niccolo's house, to see whether any of the family were there, and to concert with them the best means for obtaining an interview with him; or even, perhaps some of them might accompany him thither. He went along the Via Larga, in which there was scarce a soul to be seen from one end to the other, and the few who were, were either of the lowest class of the people, or soldiers. The shops were all partially closed, for everybody in Florence at that time lived in a state of fear, particularly in the more solitary and retired streets. The poor old man proceeded on his way, close to the wall, as quickly as his age and infirmities would allow; and, to tell the truth, his heart all the while was quivering like a leaf. As he passed the Medici palace, he perceived that at the gate a guard of landsknechts was posted; and still continuing his way forward, and keeping close to the wall, he endeavoured to escape observation as much as possible. He heard sounds of merriment and laughter, accompanied with some jeers from the soldiers, when he had passed; but as they spoke German, he did not comprehend the purport of their observations. In the little square in front of St. John's, where the great body of them were quartered, there were a great many; and not a few standing at the convent lodge; but even here he met with no obstacle or annoyance; and so going along, he arrived at last at the gate of Niccolo's house.

It was standing open, and a soldier was keeping guard before it. Father Benedict felt for a moment as if his resolution failed him, when about to pass this stern-looking man of arms, as brown and sunburnt as an old tile, with whiskers that smothered his face up to his eyes. However, summoning up all the courage he could muster, and praying God to aid him, he advanced forward, and looking at the soldier as beseechingly as he could, as if to entreat his goodwill, he rather hesitated, as if to know whether he might venture to pass on or no. Fortunately the soldier was a Spaniard, and the Spaniards of that day (the golden age of the Inquisition) could not see the robe of the order of St. Dominic, without that peculiar sensation of fear, which now-a-days a thief, for instance, feels at the sight of the uniform of a gend'arme. So that without exactly putting himself out of the way, he saluted Father Benedict, and stood on one side to allow him to enter.

We must not always trust appearances,—thought the good father, as he passed on; and he called to mind Fanfulla, who, for all his ferocious look, was so good and worthy a man. But these reflections were soon succeeded by those of a very different kind, directly he entered; the passage and courtyard, he found full of chests, trunks, and household goods; and scriveners, who with their registers were making an inventory of every article; and when he saw, bustling about in all directions, strange looking people, who had the physiognomy of bailiffs, or sheriffs' officers, he soon discovered that this ill-fated house was being subjected to a legal pillaging, by virtue of a decree of confiscation, promulgated against the goods, as they expressed it, of the rebels.

Whoever has left some beautiful garden, richly cultivated and blooming with flowers, and by-and-by revisits it, after the inundation of a torrent has destroyed and laid it all waste, leaving it covered with stones and slime, never felt so much regret, as did Father Benedict, when he saw that mansion, once the abode of neatness, wealth and taste, and of all that renders a house comfortable and elegant, now in the hands of these plunderers, who were stripping and ransacking it from top to bottom. The tears came into his eyes, and whilst he was looking round, to see who would direct him to the masters of the house, if there were any, he perceived Benedetto de Nobili standing in the middle of the courtyard, in the act of talking with a short man of sinister appearance, and giving him some keys, out of several he had in his hand; and saying with reference to those he still retained: "These that belong to the cellars, I'll keep myself; and we shall see at another time, when we are more at leisure—"

At this moment, appearing from behind his ample form, which was rendered still larger by a full-made and handsome lucco he had on, consisting entirely of fine rich scarlet cloth, a female was seen, who was covering her face and wiping her eyes with an apron; and avoiding that hateful villain, was, without perceiving him, coming straight towards Father Benedict. She was not aware of his presence, till she almost ran against him; when, all at once raising her eyes, she recognised him, and he, her.

"Why, poor Fede, you are crying!"—said the benevolent priest; though he himself could not be said to have dry eyes.

"And also—you!—and—how—can I—help—crying?"

She could say no more, for her convulsive sobs choked her utterance. Over and above all her other sorrows, and as if to fill up the measure of them, it had been her lot to have to deliver up all the keys to Nobili:—those keys which, for fifty years, had been the subject of her constant care and thought, and even her pride; which she considered as part of her very identity, which locked up all the household provisions, the linen that had been principally spun by her own hands, or at all events, selected, bought, tended and kept in order, for so long a time, by her alone; and now all these things were going—into what hands! Hearts of housewives, ladies'-maids, and wardrobe-keepers!—hearts of grandmothers, grand-aunts, and grand-spinsters of half a century, you alone know, what her distress must have been!—

Father Benedict did his best to cheer and console her; and then inquiring whether anybody was in the house, belonging to the family, he learnt that Lisa only with her child was, a prisoner as she might be called since the previous evening, in her own room at the top of the house. He now heard, for the first time, the story of their troubles at Gavinana; and this recital, which was not very lucid and perspicuous, and constantly interrupted by sobs and exclamations, by sighs and tears, was carried on, whilst he was slowly ascending the stairs, to go in search of Lisa.

"Holy Virgin!" said Mona Fede, as she raised her hand to the latch of the door, "you will be quite shocked at the sight, that will meet your eyes! —The poor creature seems quite woebegone and beside herself! She has not slept the whole night; she does not weep, but stands sad and still, with her eyes fixed on the ground, and every now and then, she'll say: '*He was a traitor then!*' and there's no means of drawing a word from her, or inducing her to move;—she never makes any other answer.—O blessed Virgin, what a sad end has this house come to, and we poor miserable creatures!—And then our master too, I wonder what will become of him?—and his sons—and my young mistress Laodamia?—to think, one don't know even, what has become of them.—O good Lord, what terrible troubles!"

"Well, open the door," said the friar; "there's no remedy, no hope but in God."

The old servant opened the door, and they entered. Lisa was sitting before a table, on which she was leaning with her elbows, and her head resting between her hands, so that her face was concealed from view, showing only her neglected and dishevelled hair; her clothes too were put on in such a disorderly fashion, that they were rather wrapped round her, than put on. By the side of the table was standing the little Arrigo; and not being as high as the edge of the table, he was holding on to it with his little hands, half frightened and half crying, to see his mother so; and with his fingers, which were small and tapering, he was vainly trying to raise himself up, so that he could look into her face; but she, mute and motionless, and quite unconscious, did not even appear to notice her child's attempts.

"Poor creature!" said Father Benedict, deeply moved; "if thy faults have been great, thy punishment is no less so!—"

Then gently approaching her, he several times called her by her name, but all in vain; he slightly shook her, and then gently placing his hand beneath her forehead, he raised her head up. She uttered a moan, as if this action distressed her; she raised her eyes, however, and looked fixedly at him; but that look was such, that, more deeply affected than before, he said to himself: "O God! what a wreck is this poor girl's mind!"

While she, shaking her head, exclaimed:

"Eh?—what do you think?—Would you ever have imagined, that he was a traitor?" And then, remaining silent for a moment, she added, shrugging up her shoulders: "And yet, it's true—he was a traitor!"

"O my child! my poor girl!" said Father Benedict, "you have indeed too much cause to weep—and I, who have heard something of your troubles, have come to hear how you were, to offer my services, in what little I can do, to console you

—and to weep with you.—Come, my poor girl—do—try—cheer up a bit—your trial, I allow, is terrible—but God does not send us calamities for our harm; He sends them, that we may turn to Him, and remember that we are not to seek for happiness here below, but only in Himself—"

Lisa appeared attentive to these words, and from this the good priest drew a favourable omen; but, suddenly interrupting him, and grasping his hands with convulsive force, she said:

"But tell me truly, father Benedict, would you have believed he was a traitor?"

"Why, my child, no, I should not; but who can look into men's hearts, but God alone?—So true is this, that I told Sir Niccolo—"

"Ah, then you knew it!—but why—why not tell me too, why not tell poor me?—why did you all agree together to betray this poor hapless girl?"

"But—my child—calm yourself—I pray; calm yourself, for the love of God; you have not understood me—"

Fede too, who was crying fit to break her heart, said:

"Calm yourself, my dear young lady, the good father has not said anything of that sort—"

"Well, I am calm, I am not saying anything. —What did I say?" And the poor girl looked first at one, and then at the other, with eyes so strange and wild, that they were both more than ever alarmed.

"Oh! pray, don't think of these sad things now; come, cheer up a little!—drive away the recollection of that miserable—pardon him—pray God to have pity on him; and then forget him!"

"And what am I to do to forget him, if I have him always here" (and she placed her hand upon her bosom) "here in my heart; so that the thought of him tortures and consumes me, and never allows me respite or repose?—I who loved him so much, that he was all the world to me—I saw and felt nothing, but him alone!—why not tell me, while it was yet time:—'Take care, for he is a traitor!' . . .—"

"And for the very reason that he is one, you ought to forget him, my child: and now more than ever, when your poor father is in such trouble! Think of your poor father!"

"Oh! my dear father—to be sure—where is he?—what have they done with him?" exclaimed Lisa, as if some terrible idea had just flashed upon her mind, altogether strange and unexpected. "Ah, to be sure, vile wretch that I am!—to be sure.—But if I have no longer my senses!—if my head is quite gone!—Have compassion on me, Father Benedict; pity me, I am a poor crazy girl —I feel it, my brain is no longer my own—Oh, tell me about my father—what has become of him?—"

And here seizing her hair distractedly, she wept aloud, shedding torrents of tears, and saying with a choking voice: "And to think—that--I have been—the cause of all!—that I shall—have his death—to blame myself for!—Oh!" she exclaimed, rising up hastily, and arranging her dress, which hung about her all in disorder, "let us go, for the love of God, let us go to him at once—I will die at his feet—I cannot die else.—Ah, to be able to save him! to be able to find some means of dying for him!—Tell me how I can, and take me to him —What can I give you? what have I still left?—this child's life?—well, take it—all, everything! only let not that poor old man's blood bespatter my face, let it not rain down on my soul like liquid fire—"

The priest and Mona Fede, while she thus raved almost bereft of her senses, were standing round her, trying every means to calm her with words, with gestures, with endearments, and persuasions, which the poor girl neither heard nor heeded. The flood of tears that gave vent to her sorrows, relieved her much more effectually; and gradually her violent convulsions calmed down, her sobs became less frequent, the heaving of her bosom less violent and rapid, and her eyes assumed more of their natural expression, so much so, that Father Benedict thought he might take her with him, and try, in company with her, to gain admission into the prison.

Mona Fede set about adjusting her dress, and arranging her hair as well as she could, whilst Lisa, taking her child into her arms, and pressing him to her heart and kissing him, said, as she bathed his face with her tears: "O my poor child! when thou comest to know the history of thy family, and the sorrows of thy poor mama, thou wilt know how much suffering thou hast cost us all.—Fede, I leave Arrigo in your care—be sure you lock yourself in!"

She put her child down, and turned to go; then suddenly stopping, she turned round, and came back to kiss him once more, and said, as she fondly pressed his head between her hands: "O my darling, God bless thee! May He never punish thee for thy poor mother's faults!—Thou who art innocent—oh, that thou couldst pray for me!"

When she kissed him for the last time, she said: "Shall I ever see thee again, my darling child?" Then tearing herself from him, she followed the friar, and they descended together into the court-yard.

Father Benedict thought of asking Nobili, to allow Lisa to leave the house with him—or, still better, to try and get permission from him for her to see her father.

He found him in a corner of the porch, where, surrounded by a huge pile of furniture, and superintending the labours of his underlings, he was seated on Niccolo's own chair, the very one which used to stand in his own room by the hearth, and therefore Father Benedict knew it well. At the sight of it, the memory of his unhappy friend rose still more painfully to his mind, and he could not approach Nobili and address him, without betraying signs of the deep emotion that he felt. However, making an effort to restrain his feelings, he said:

" Signor Benedetto, I have to ask of you as a favour, that Mistress Lisa be allowed to leave this house—and that she may have a safe pass to the prison, to go and see her father. You will not, I am sure, refuse her this consolation?"

Nobili was on the point of giving a preremptory refusal; for so far from being inclined to gratify Niccolo, he would have been only too glad to spite him to the utmost of his power, exasperated as he had been by the scene we have described above. But true to his natural hypocrisy, he considered that it would answer no end to show himself cruel in such a case; whereas, on the other hand, he could, at a small cost, appear charitable and humane, and superior to all ideas of revenge or party feeling. He began, therefore:

" In truth, I ought not—and I don't think I can—for the orders are strict. But yet—I feel—it would be most inhuman to refuse a daughter, leave to visit her father." And with a sigh he raised his eyes, and added: " Truly, these poor creatures are already sufficiently miserable. Oh, state policy!—it is indeed a terrible thing!"

" God requite you for your goodness.—Would you now be so kind as to send one of your men with us to accompany us?"

" Oh—Signor Cecco," he called out, beckoning to a spare, ill-conditioned little man, " I say—go with these good people, and pass them in to go and see Niccolo. If any one says anything, make use of my name."

Having obtained this permission, the priest and Lisa went along with their guide. As they passed through the passage, to get into the street, he saw lying on the ground, amidst a heap of things, the portrait of Father Jerome; and perceived that, in mockery, they had blackened it all over with charred wood; and put horns to it, and other disfigurements. He turned his eyes away from it with pain and grief, and quickening his step, he thought it an age, before he got clear out, from this scene of ruin and desolation.

CHAPTER XII.

THE anger with which he had allowed himself to be transported against Nobili, and the harsh language he had used to him, Niccolo now began to reflect upon with deep regret; bitterly lamenting that he had not restrained this outburst of feeling, at a time, when the near approach of his last hour, ought to have infused into his heart the holier principles of charity and forbearance. He endeavoured to recal his thoughts, and to forget that painful scene, by turning his mind wholly upon God, and imploring forgiveness for his sin; expressing before Him, as the only atonement in his power, his sincere desire of forgiving the man, who had effected the ruin of his country, and praying that He would, of his mercy, purge him in these his last moments, of every leaven of hatred, that might still remain in his heart.

Thus by degrees he succeeded in composing his mind, and remained much in the same condition, till the palace clock struck four. Presently he heard in the adjoining passage a sound of footsteps, and that clanking of keys, which so frequently strikes on the ears of the miserable inmates of a prison; he then heard the door of his cell unlocked, and the bolts shot back; and at last the door opened wide, and in came a man, who, from his dark cloak, and the medal round his neck, with the Florentine lily upon it, he knew to be the magistrates' clerk. Five or six officers and messengers accompanied him; and took their station on both sides of him; when, turning to Niccolo, he said, in the form of words usual on these mournful occasions: "Niccolo, I am sorry to have to announce to you that which it is my duty to announce; namely, that in conformity with the resolution passed by the Supreme Council of the Florentine Republic, thou art condemned to be beheaded, which sentence is to be executed this night at twelve o'clock, in the court-yard of the public prison. So may our Lord Jesus Christ grant, that thy soul may rest in peace. Niccolo, answer me, hast thou heard, and understood? so that these may be able to bear witness thereof?"

"I have," replied the old man, who at this announcement exhibited not the slightest alteration of countenance; he then immediately added, in a calm, but at the same time, a grave and solemn tone: "Not for myself, for I willingly accept this death for my sins, but on behalf of the rights of my countrymen, and of Florence, and of the plighted faith of treaties guaranteed on oath, which is now broken and violated in my person, I protest against, and declare null and void this condemnation."

The gaolers, and the clerk who had everything about him of the gaoler, but the dress, either understood not, or were regardless of Niccolo's protest, which they confounded with the usual declarations of innocence of all condemned persons, at the moment when sentence of death is pronounced upon them. They then directed him to rise up, without treating him harshly ; nor, on the other hand, using much ceremony, or exhibiting any pity for him, but with that indifference, that is acquired in every occupation, by dint of long habit; and helping him, as they perceived he could scarcely stand upon his feet to walk, they led him slowly to the chapel.

Since the year 1260, when the Bargello Palace was used by the Priors, and they heard mass every morning in the chapel, it had undergone no alteration, but preserved its simple and venerable antiquity. It was a rectangular building, surmounted by an ample and lofty dome, with four convergent curves, rising from the capitals of the light pillars, that were placed at the corners, divided into four parts, meeting at the summit, where, instead of the brace, was the Florentine shield of the Guelphs. These curves were painted with alternate rows of red and white ; the ground was azure (now discoloured by time and the vapour of the candles), besprinkled all over with golden stars. Facing you, as you entered, was the altar, with a large crucifix of dark-coloured wood, of which the figure was of the natural size, covered, as far as half-way down the leg, with a tunic or dark cloak, embroidered with silver, like the Volto Santo of Lucca; on either side, two tapers were burning, and the walls were painted all over by the hands of those artists, who adorned the Camposanto of Pisa, Buffalmaco, Gaddi, Tafi, &c.; but owing to their being stained with smoke, the pictures were scarce visible. The light reflected from the setting sun (for its direct rays could not find their way in) illuminated the colours of the stained glass of two large windows: and penetrating into the interior of the chapel, diffused through it a sombre and mysterious gloom, amid which the lights on the altar shone conspicuously forth.

Close to the altar, the company of the Brothers of Mercy had already taken their station. They consisted of four priests and a superior, habited in their dark cloaks, with the cowl drawn over the face, leaving the eyes only visible from two round holes. They had placed in a corner against the wall a large crucifix of theirs, which they used to carry in procession, on which an arch fixed in the upper arm supported a black cloth, with two white crosses on it.

When Niccolo entered, supported by the gaolers, the brothers were reciting the vespers in a low solemn tone. As soon as they saw him, they all advanced to meet him, and receiving him from the hands of his keepers, who at once returned towards the door, and remained there on guard, one of them said: "God preserve thee, Niccolo, and since he now calls thee to himself from the miseries of this mortal life, we are here to assist thee and to render thee such services as are in our power, as our duty is, and our holy rule enjoins."

So saying, they directed him to a couch that was placed in front of the altar; on which those who were condemned to death used to repose, if weakness, or age, or their infirmities required it.

Niccolo having sat down, replied: "I thank you, good brothers. May God requite you for your charity."

They then proceeded to a corner, where a small table stood ready, which they brought, and placed beside the old man; they then laid upon it a clean towel, and set on all the various things that are requisite to furnish the table for a meal, except knives, which were not allowed to the condemned, and asked Niccolo, when he would like to sup, and what food he would take for his meal.

"I have no wish to oppress myself with food, my children; for the few hours that yet remain to me, I ought to think of the spirit, and not of the body; yet, that I may not suffer my strength to go too low, I'll take a little pottage, and a drop of wine; and once more I heartily thank you."

They were both soon brought to him, and having taken this slight nourishment, Niccolo was evidently reinvigorated by it; for he was considerably prostrated, and his strength much exhausted when he was brought in. The men who waited on him, perceiving that he was somewhat revived, and no longer so languid and depressed as before, seemed to be conferring together on some matter or other, and whispering very gently into each other's ears; presently four of them, advancing towards the door, stood between it and Niccolo; while the fifth placed himself by his side, as if to speak with him, as they do with condemned prisoners, and approaching his mouth to his ear, he said in a low tone: "I have something to say to you, Sir:—mind you don't look that way, or give any intimation of surprise, for fear those fellows on guard should notice it."

Niccolo, though somewhat surprised, gave him to understand that he would do according to his directions.

"You must know then," said the man, "that I am Bozza, and those others there, are your son Bindo, Sir Lambert, and he whom they call Fanfulla, and a servant of theirs; last night, before break of dawn, they came and summoned me, and it was settled that we were to take the place of the Brothers of Mercy, whose turn it was to come here to minister to you; and so, we are come in their stead. Beneath our cloaks we have arms, and we have resolved to rescue you, or to die in the attempt; and what Bozza promised you in St. Mark's, he now comes to fulfil:—the plan we have devised for doing it, you will now hear from Sir Lambert, whom I am going to send to you. In this way you will speak with them all, one by one, without the guard having any idea of our object;

for such is the custom of the friars with the condemned.—"

Before Niccolo could reply, he rose up; and presently, Lambert and Bindo were at the old man's side. Each of them taking hold of one of his hands, in such a way as not to be seen, which from time to time they kissed from beneath their cowls, Lambert said: "Our only fear was, that you would not be able to support yourself, so as to walk; but since, thank Heaven, you can do that, the rest we'll take care of;—we'll make a rush upon the guard; and if we should succeed in getting away without a commotion, we have got with us a cloak of one of the Brothers of Mercy to put on you, and in this way, we shall be able to get out. Other friars will come—apparently to relieve us in the course of services.—I trust we shall succeed—for no other hope remains to us. A good many people are stationed outside to wait for us, and they'll help us.—"

"Lambert, Bindo, my sons!" said Niccolo, interrupting him, "I thank God for having bestowed on me a comfort, that I never expected, and did not deserve—that of seeing you again, once more.—I thank you—and knowing you as I do, I am sure you would do even more than you say—but I cannot accept your noble and generous offers, and I pray you, nay, I command you as a father, to abandon all thoughts of your present design. Could I go forth from this place without risk, without harm to any one, still would I refuse.

—Think then, whether I would willingly risk the lives of so many, and your lives too, which may perhaps one day be expended in your country's service! And do you imagine that the thought of dying is terrible to me? That I can deem it a hard fate, after living ninety-one years, and after so many toils, that I have encountered with the hope of seeing this my poor unhappy country glorious and free, and which have only too sadly ended in seeing her fallen to the lowest depth of misery, without the power to repair or to resist her fate! What—can you think that I fear death? I long for it, my children! Amid the many sorrows that press upon me, it is the only soothing and welcome thought, that visits my lone heart! And would you be for depriving me of it? would you rob me of that rest, which Heaven at last vouchsafes to this worn out and decrepit frame, for the very reason, that He knows it has now suffered enough? What more could I yet do for this ill-fated land? Would you have me forget for myself, the instructions I was wont to give you; that it ought to be our aim, not to protract life as long as possible, but to spend it virtuously and honourably, and to be able to quit it with a manly composure, whenever it may be necessary?"

At these words the young men could not restrain their tears, and with the most impassioned earnestness besought him, trying every means in their power to induce him to alter his resolution. Thereupon Niccolo, clothing his aspect with that air of authority, which none of his family ever thought of opposing, said: "I thought I had, by precept and example, instructed you in that virtuous character, which belongs to good citizens and patriots, and I rejoiced in having, as I supposed, brought you up with such principles, that you would on every occasion prefer the interests of your country to every other consideration.—Do you wish me to go to the scaffold with the sad reflection, that not even in this have I succeeded?—That an aged man of fourscore and eleven years should live a few days more or less, can this be of any consequence to the welfare of Florence? Think then of your country, not of me; think of getting out of this place, and betaking yourselves to a place of safety, and then you may one day be called upon to make the sacrifice of your lives in a worthy cause—think about rallying the exiles of the popular party.—In these services I have grown old, and I know how they are managed—think of preparing revenge—of returning one day powerful, to free that country, that we could not defend from traitors and treachery.—Think, I say, of this, if you are Niccolo's sons, and if you value his blessing.—Saw I not your brothers fall? Did I weep or lament, or did I try to stop them from discharging their duty? And do you think, I loved them less, than you love me? And now no more, not a word will I add, for the discoursing about such matters too much affects and unmans both you and me. Farewell, my children; let us now part, and we shall meet again in joy, in that country, which the brave, and not the faint-hearted, make their own; in that kingdom, of which our Lord said : *Vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.*"

The extraordinary and inflexible firmness of the brave old man, communicated itself, like a flame, to the hearts of these young men, who with so noble an example before their eyes, felt themselves, so to speak, transported to a superior region, where the interests and the sufferings of earth lay beneath their feet.

Convinced that all their entreaties would now be in vain, and inflamed with the desire of proving themselves, such as he wished them to be, (for as they could not save him, it was the only consolation now left them,) they both promised him, not to deviate in the slightest degree from his wishes.

"We shall learn to master our grief," said Lambert, "and the recollection of your virtue will be a support to us—you shall have no cause to be ashamed of your sons—and we swear to you, that while life lasts, your wishes and your thoughts shall be ours——"

"And so may Heaven bless you," replied Niccolo, with an air of tranquil delight diffused over his whole countenance ; "so will my blessing always attend you ; and my prayers will aid you from on high, where, by the mercy of God, I hope to dwell.—Now, just one word or two about the affairs of earth; and then, I shall have no farther thoughts about this world. Lambert, you will recollect that no long time ago, I recommended my household to your care. That household is now represented by this youth alone. Remember that you are brothers, be kind to, and help each other; and thou, Bindo, since Heaven ordains that you be an orphan, listen to Lambert's counsels, and by them direct your life.—Laodamia, I have no need to commend to your protection, Lambert; she is thy betrothed wife, and I know thee well;—but Lisa!—Oh, when she was born, had any one have told me!——But God's will be done!—She has now, more than ever, need of support and comfort, poor girl! You must know——" and here he related to them all that he had heard from Nobili.

The young men became speechless at this account, so great was the indignation that fired their bosoms against that traitorous villain, and such their astonishment at a circumstance, which was entirely contrary to all their expectations. After giving vent to their feelings of indignation, they, on their side, related to Niccolo all that happened, after they had parted on the road to Prato; they told him that they had left Laodamia at Montemurlo in the care of the parish priest and Selvaggia; for being utterly exhausted and very ill, she was not able to be moved, but had urged them, by all means, to come with the greatest haste to Florence, in order to try their utmost, to save her father. Niccolo, in his turn, could not help expressing his surprise, that human wickedness could go to such lengths; and how it was, that he could ever have placed so much confidence in such a villain as Troilus.

"Heaven designed to correct us, and rendered us blind—taking away our understanding—*quos vult perdere, prius dementat.*—In this also, *fiat voluntas tua!*—Now carry to my daughters my last blessing; to Laodamia, the angel of my poor house;—and to Lisa, my pardon too.—So may Heaven deign to forgive her errors.—Watch over that poor forsaken and desolate creature; and let us take comfort from the reflection, that the vile arts by which she was deceived, stain not her that was the victim of them, but only brand the author of them with eternal infamy. Thank Fanfulla, Bozza, and your serving-man, who, for the love of God, were willing to expose themselves to such a desperate risk: and may God reward and bless you all ——"

At that moment there was a slight noise at the door. The young men turned round, and so did Niccolo, leaving his sentence half-finished; when they saw Bozza, who had been engaged for a moment in conversation with the persons outside, approaching them; and no sooner was he close to them, than he exclaimed:

"Here's Father Benedict of St. Mark's; and he's bringing with him Mistress Lisa."

"God of Heaven!" exclaimed Niccolo, transported with the most lively joy, "how have I deserved such happiness—such a consolation!"

And indeed it was the greatest that could now have happened to him.

"Do you," he said to Lambert and Bindo, "remain on one side: it's better, that even they should not know it's you."

The priest came forward, followed by Lisa; who, with her eyes bent to the ground, and her whole frame violently agitated, was weeping bitterly.

"Oh! Father Benedict, have you then ventured to expose yourself to such trouble, and perhaps danger, just to come and console me?"

And the two old men embraced, and remained locked in each other's arms for some time, blending their venerable grey hairs, as they bent over each other's neck. When Father Benedict rose up, Niccolo saw at his feet, with her forehead touching the ground, his unhappy daughter; whom the sight of her father in that gloomy place, of the terrible preparations that were being made for his death, and the distracting thought, that all this was owing to her, had smitten with such terror, had overwhelmed with such a sense of dreary and desolate wretchedness, that she would have welcomed death, would have been glad, if she could have been swallowed up, and buried beneath those marble stones, on which her head was resting, and annihilated that very instant, in order to escape from a torment, a thousand times greater than any her imagination could have conceived. Her whole frame shook with a convulsive tremor, a cold sweat covered her body, and from time to time she exclaimed, in a weak, exhausted voice: "Pardon! pardon!"

The heart of her bitterest enemy would have felt pity for her; fancy then, what a father's heart must have felt! He wanted to rise, in order to lift her from the ground; but Father Benedict did not give him time, for raising her up and encouraging her with kind and soothing words, which Niccolo accompanied with similar expressions of tenderness, he succeeded, at last, in getting her to stand up. As she raised her eyes, and fixed them upon her father, all glassy and motionless, with a wild unconscious expression, he too, in his own mind, formed the same opinion that Father Benedict had done just before, and said, as he looked up to heaven: "O poor luckless girl! this is the last of misfortunes!"

Then taking her hand in his, he bade her sit down by him; his other hand, he placed on her forehead, and it seemed to him, like touching a stone. Trying to render his voice and his looks as kind and gentle as possible, he said, as he drew his daughter's head to his bosom: "Come, my poor child! rest thy head here; warm it at thy father's heart, who freely pardons thee, and weeps for thee. —Oh! how cold thou art, poor thing!—God of mercy, forget what, in my anger, proceeded from my lips against this sad and suffering girl—remember only my pardon and her penitence. The poor thing has suffered enough, has been chastened enough! Lisa! my dear child!—pray, don't be so sad; listen to me, my love!—It is thy own dear father, who speaks to thee, to console thee!"

Lisa, who till now had never ceased trembling, without giving any sign whether she heard, or no, the words of comfort addressed to her by her father, seemed slightly to arouse herself, and answered:

"I hear you, father dear!—God reward you for having been so good as to bestow such caresses on me—on me, wretched girl that I am!"

"My poor child! Come, cheer up—I, you see, am going to leave you.—Make me happy, my Lisa, by letting me see you a little more like yourself—a little more calm.—I have forgiven you, I assure you once more; and I give you my blessing. It was no fault of yours, my child!—you were seduced into error!—and what error!—and we, too, have fallen into the deception that was practised on you.—But you!—you have been indeed deceived!—Now—listen to me—I have something to tell you—it will give you pain, and shock you at first—but it releases you from a heavy duty—it removes you from worse misfortunes.—Do you feel your mind sufficiently calm to hear it?"

"I am calm, father dear—you see I am."

Niccolo, when he saw the violently heaving bosom, the paleness, and above all, the wild looks of his daughter, did not feel quite so sure of it; yet, as he thought and hoped, it was for her good eventually, rather than calculated to do her harm, he said:

"Hear me then, my dear Lisa. You have indeed been most cruelly betrayed—but the extent to which you have been imposed upon, you know not.—Now, you must consider, before I say any more, that the shame is theirs who betray, not theirs who are betrayed—so that you must not think yourself what you never were, and never could be—for a naughty girl thou never wast.—Know then—and I could almost say rejoice to hear it—you are not Troilus's wife—you never were—"

Lisa started.

"Be calm, my poor girl! Hear me—you will see,—that perhaps God is opening to you a way—attend to me. No, you are not his wife; he made up a false marriage;—the man you took for a priest, was his groom. And then this villain, not satisfied with this, formed a design upon your sister's honour. Last night, he conducted her to Il Barone, and if a merciful God had not interposed, she could not have escaped from his power." And in few words, he related the whole transaction to her. "My poor Lisa! I know it must appear to you a most terrible blow, and so it did to me, when I first heard it. But remember, no fault rests with you, since your will concurred not; and therefore no shame can accrue to you. It was a misfortune, a very heavy one, and nothing else—but let me ask you, would it not be a still worse misfortune, to find yourself indissolubly tied to him, as his wife? You are now, however, free; you can—I will not bid you hate him—forgive him, my child—and so may God forgive him; but you can shun him—you will not be bound and tied to a traitor—you will be able to live, if not happy, at least in peace and self-respect, with your brothers and Laodamia—go, where they go—and perhaps—I am old—you see—and have learnt, that here below, nothing is permanent; happiness is not, but so neither is misery;—perhaps the time will come, when the wounds of thy poor heart will heal—"

Whilst her father was speaking, Lisa kept her eyes intently fixed upon him, and appeared to be listening. But all at once, clasping her hands violently together, she exclaimed, in a voice that is only wrung from out of a broken heart:—" What, then, he never loved me, never!—not even then! All he ever said to me was not true, then!—not a word! And then what a sweet face! Oh—he had the beauty of an angel! O Troilus, how handsome you were!—"

At this point Niccolo, who kept his eyes fixed on his daughter, full of sorrowful apprehensions, saw her countenance, and the expression of her eyes, all at once, change, and become transformed, so to say, into quite a new face, just as if the first had disappeared, in the same way as when a person takes off a mask.

The light of reason, which was already flickering, had been, at this last blow, totally extinguished; the poor girl's brain had turned:—she was a maniac.

She remained quite still for some time; she then extended her arms like a person who stretches himself from drowsiness or torpor, presently she laughed, and, moving her lips with great rapidity, she seemed to be talking to herself, using various gestures, first with one hand, then with the other.

Niccolo covered his eyes with his hands, and Father Benedict, deeply moved at the sight of both, said in a calm and dignified tone :

" Niccolo, you must remember, that Jesus our Lord, holy and innocent, suffered on the cross far more than you now suffer ! He suffered for thee too, and also for poor Lisa. Let us adore his judgment upon this poor, forlorn girl. How know we, but that this may be for her good ? We know for certain, that her soul, too, was redeemed by his sacred blood.—From a God of so much love, how can we do otherwise than hope for mercy ? Let us bow our heads and adore ; and let us together say : *Non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.*"

Niccolo, who, till now, had remained with his hands raised to his eyes, repeated the words : *Non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu !* And his arms sunk down upon the bed, utterly powerless.

Seeing Fanfulla standing at a little distance, he beckoned to him to approach, and then softly said to him :

" Lead her home, poor thing ! and God have mercy upon her ! "

Fanfulla going up to Lisa took her by the hand, and led her towards the door ; and she, like a poor crazed thing, let herself be led any way.

They went out, and as they crossed the threshold, the poor old man raised his withered arms, to implore the divine goodness for his daughter, and as he thought of the malediction he once called down upon her head, he exclaimed :

"O my God! my God! why didst thou so listen to me!" . . . .

The windows had by this time ceased to transmit any light, the tapers from the altar were alone reflected upon them; for it had now become quite dark outside. Other brothers of mercy had now come in, who in two rows on either side of the altar, were reciting the psalms in a low voice, not to distract the condemned prisoner. As for him, he moved not, he spoke not; his head reclined upon his breast, and Father Benedict sitting by him, was holding his hands, and affectionately pressing them from time to time, without however saying a word, as he thought it better for the present to let him indulge his sorrow,that this last terrible blow might gradually expend its force of itself. Continuing in this way for some minutes, the priest at last said:

"God gives you the opportunity, Niccolo, of doing much, in these few remaining hours of your life, since He causes you to suffer much! Thou must do thy utmost to bear this cross with patience and resignation ;—and in order to quiet your mind, in some measure, with regard to Lisa, remember that He who cares for the sparrow, that flies upon the house-tops, and clothes the lily of the field, will take still more thought for a creature formed in his own image, and whom He has created neither to destroy nor to torment!—Consider how many, and how great have been her sufferings!—

the veil, that Heaven has permitted to descend upon her understanding, was perhaps mercifully designed to blunt the sense of her sorrows.—Let us adore, Niccolo, let us humbly adore; and hope in Him, who breaks not the bruised reed, *Calamum quassatum non confringet*—let us hope in the author of that precept of love, in which he hath directed, that all men in their sufferings and their miseries, should lift up their heart to Him, and call him—Father!—"

Niccolo, joining his hands, said with a deep sigh: *Non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu;* and after a moment's silence, he began again by saying; "My father, I believe as most true all you have said; and would it be possible for me to doubt the divine goodness, whilst there is granted to me the greatest, the sweetest of all comforts, that of having you by me, and hearing such exhortations from your lips? May God's will be done, with regard to me and my poor children! I resign myself wholly to Him.—Now there remains but one thing to say to you, it is my last request—and then I'll turn all my thoughts to heaven. I should wish to be buried to-morrow, without any pomp, clad in the habit of St. Dominic, in our ancestral vault in St. Mark's church, at the altar of the Blessed Virgin, and that you should say the mass for the repose of my soul."

"That I promise you shall be done—Niccolo; and any other wish you may express shall be sacredly complied with."

"I have no other, father; and I thank you.—

But—yes—one other thing, I have to beg of you, After so many agitations I feel myself quite exhausted in mind and body:—I would that I could keep my mind fixed on God—but it wanders—my head aches so, that it seems ready to cleave asunder.—I should be glad—if you would let me support it for a little on your shoulder, and that you would lay your hand tight on my forehead—I fancy it would be a relief to me: and if I could in this way get a little rest, I could then attend better to the concerns of my soul——"

The good father did not wait for him to finish his words, but taking that venerable head between his hands, he rested it partly on his shoulder, and partly on his bosom, in such a way that he could remain longest in the same position without moving.

Niccolo in a few minutes closed his eyes, and from his excessive weariness, sunk into a placid sleep. Upon the friars who were reciting their office, perceiving it, they stopped, in order not to wake him, each remaining quite still where he was. This silent and impressive scene lasted almost half an hour; and there was something in it indescribably touching and unearthly, as you looked upon the tranquil serenity of that aged man, whose heavy breathing was the only sound that broke upon the silence of the place; and thought what must be the fortitude and virtue of the man, who was thus calmly awaiting the approach of death.

At last, a longer and a deeper breath gave the signal of his awaking. And as he did so, he slowly raised his head, placed his hand to his forehead, and then said: "You have given me the greatest possible comfort, father; may God requite you.—Oh! what things," he said with a slight smile, "what divine and beautiful things have I seen in my sleep. O God, thou art too gracious to thy poor servant!—Last night too, He vouchsafed to me to see his glory—he sent his holy martyr to visit me.—Oh, father, what joy! Just think—he came again—I saw him before me—and he consoled me!—*Quid retribuam Domino?* How shall my abject misery worthily thank the eternal goodness for such a gift?—I now feel my heart full of that strength, which God alone can give; of that life, which He alone imparts, and which can neither be corrupted nor perish!"

"Then let us thank Him—let us join in thanking Him," said the priest, filled with the sweetest joy, at seeing the afflicted old man thus strengthened and comforted.

"Yes," he replied, "glory to God in the highest heavens!—let me prepare to enter into his glory."

Niccolo, now finding his mind more free, prepared to make his last confession. When he had done, they proceeded to give him the viaticum; and Father Benedict going to the altar, had the candles lighted, and put on the sacerdotal vestments.

The friars then, each with a lighted taper, ranged themselves around the altar steps; two only (and these were Lambert and Bindo) came close to Niccolo, and arranging a cushion on the ground for him to kneel upon, they placed themselves by his side to support him.

Father Benedict took the pyx from the tabernacle, and opened it; then taking out a small portion, and turning himself round, he raised his hands to a level with his breast, pronouncing those sweet and sublime words:—*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.* Niccolo all the while,—the light of paradise beaming in his face, —was on his knees, supported by his sons; and in this attitude, he raised his white and trembling hands towards the host.

Whoever recals the head of St. Jerome, painted by Domenichino in this same act, will have a distant idea of the divine and ardent love, that was stamped on Niccolo's countenance. When he saw Father Benedict, in the act of presenting to him the sacramental wafer, he exclaimed, shedding sweet and precious tears: "I thank Thee, O Almighty God, that Thou comest to visit thy servant, to conduct his immortal soul out of the miseries of this dark valley! Cleanse me from every stain and every sin, for of all I repent, and implore thy forgiveness! Accept that, which I now, from my heart, grant to my enemies—to those who have taken from us our country.—You, who are here present, be my witnesses, that, dying, I forgive the Palleschi—I feel in my heart that I regard them as brothers—and I promise to pray for them in heaven, so that we may all one day meet in the heavenly Jerusalem, where hatred and animosity will be extinguished, and where we shall live in the full participation of the eternal love."

The by-standers were all melted into tears; Father Benedict too wept, and so overcome was he by the strong emotions that agitated him, that his knees shook, when he placed the sacrament between the old man's pallid lips.

Returning to the altar, he finished the prayers; and having taken off the vestments, he returned to the side of his friend, who still continued on his knees, supported by his sons, who were weeping bitterly. His countenance was erect, his eyes serene and cheerful, and he kept, from time to time, repeating short and secret prayers.

He remained in this way about an hour. The palace clock struck eleven. The officer entered, whose duty it was to execute the sentence. A heavy, muscular man, with a downcast look, came close up to Niccolo, and according to the usual custom, said:

"Sir, I do but discharge my office, and I pray your pardon."

"Rather say my thanks, which I give you; for you open to me the gate of Paradise."

And Niccolo saluted him. He then said to Father Benedict:

"Be so good as to cut off these few locks on my neck;—that's the last trouble, I shall give you."

A pair of scissors was sent for, and Niccolo's silvery hair was shorn off, and being gathered up by the friar, he gave it into the old man's hand, at a sign from him. Niccolo, observing that he was not seen, put it under Bindo's cloak, into his hand, which he pressed hard; and the poor father felt concentrated, so to say, in that pressure of his son's hand, all the deep love that he had ever borne, and still bore to that his last and most beloved child.

Another hour passed.—Twelve o'clock struck—ten officers entered with lighted torches. Father Benedict, his sons, and all of them knew what this meant, and gave a shudder. Niccolo alone remained, as at first, calm and unmoved. He was assisted to rise, and turning to the friars, that surrounded him, and who had taken up their crucifix to bear it aloft before him, he said twice, quite cheerfully: "Farewell! Farewell!"

They moved on. Bindo was supporting him on one side, Lambert behind, and Father Benedict was on the other side; and carrying before him a small tablet with a crucifix upon it, he was suggesting to him prayers and aspirations, sometimes in the Latin, sometimes in the vulgar tongue. Niccolo's step was bold and firm, neither quick nor slow.

They reached the door at the top of the staircase, from whence the court-yard was visible, all illuminated by a vast number of torches, and crowded with marshalmen and soldiers, with their halberds, all silent, and with their eyes turned upward in the direction of the prisoner.

Niccolo descended the steps in the way we have described; and advancing into the midst of the court, where stood the block, and the executioner with a gleaming axe, which he held by both hands, he stopped and said to him: "When I lay my head on the block, allow me a moment, that I may commend my soul to God."

Then looking round upon all, he said in a clear voice: "I pardon my enemies, and pray God to accept this my death for the salvation of my country."

He knelt down, and placed his head on the block.

Bindo and Lambert closed their eyes, and for a moment there was a death-like silence—which was followed by a dull and heavy blow.—When they opened them—the trunk lay on the ground, on one side, the venerable head with its face upward, on the other, white as marble, and with a serene smile still upon it.

They still had strength enough to come forward; they took up the body, and laid it out on the bier, and then placed the head close to it, and it looked (so precise was the stroke of the axe) just as if a scarlet thread were tied round the neck. . . .

. . . .

On the 16th of August before daybreak, the bell of St. Mark's was sounding forth a funeral knell. Within the church was placed in the centre a bier, with four iron candlesticks at the four corners; at the altar was Father Benedict, saying mass, clothed in black vestments, in the same manner as we described in the first chapter of this tale. On the bier was the corpse of Niccolo, clothed in the habit of St. Dominic.

Lambert, Bindo, Fanfulla, Maurice, Bozza, and a crowd of workmen and people of the lower class, were kneeling around, engaged in prayer, all in deep silence, and quite still; save that now and then, with the backs of their hands, they would brush away the tears from their eyes.

The mass was ended: the funeral rites too were ended. Then there came some of the men belonging to the convent, and, with iron levers, raised the stone which covered a tomb opposite the altar of the Virgin. Lambert, Bindo, and the rest, took the body in the sheet in which it was wrapped, and reverently, and with the greatest care, let it down into the grave. The stone was restored to its place. Those poor work-people prayed and wept over it for some time, and then one by one, they went away; and in the church there remained only Bindo, Lambert, Fanfulla, and Maurice.

The two brothers kneeling down on the stone, that covered Niccolo, hand in hand, Lambert said with a loud and firm voice: "We swear to God and to thee, our father, to do what in us lies, ever while life lasts, to restore Florence to liberty, and never till then, to lay down our arms; and to wage war with her enemies to the death."

Then rising up, they left the church.—

CONCLUSION.

The articles of the treaty for the surrender of Florence stipulated for the lives, liberty and property of all the inhabitants without exception. These articles had been solemnly sworn to, by the commissary Baccio Valori and Don Ferrante Gonzaga. But no sooner had they become masters of the city, than they put several to death, many they plundered of their goods, and banished still more, assigning to every one his place of exile; and whoever went beyond the appointed limits, was declared a rebel. Such was the beginning of the Medicean rule.

The different cities of Italy became filled with outlawed Florentines, which they arrived at, in a state of utter exhaustion, poor, miserable-looking objects, from famine and the long siege, as well as from the fatigues of their sad and painful journey to the place of their banishment. The sight of their sufferings, the spectacle of old men, matrons and children forcibly expelled from their homes, with the most shameful violation of good faith, called forth a general cry of indignation against the authors of such abominable cruelty, and perhaps excited some degree of remorse in the hearts of those, who could, but would not, hinder it. With such errors, followed by similar regrets, Italian history abounds.

Many Florentine families, without waiting for the decree of the new government against them, voluntarily quitted the city, and retiring to some quiet spot, out of their jurisdiction, were only anxious to remain there unnoticed and forgotten; perhaps, thinking that in this way they would not be entirely beyond sight of their beloved country. Several retired to Seravezza, where, even to the present day, tradition points out the houses occupied by these fugitives.

In the midst of the chain of the Apuan mountains, which extend away on the right, as you go from Lucca to Sarzana by the way of Pietrasanta, displaying their steep and naked precipices, rising one above the other, and shooting out in an infinite variety of forms and shapes, and exhibiting every possible shade of colour; in the centre (I say) of these mountains, a narrow, winding valley opens, through which, descending from the heights delle Panie, runs the sparkling and limpid Versilia, beneath the shade of thickly clustering chestnut-trees of great age. The jaws of this valley, masked by the overlapping of two steep and lofty hill-tops, are not visible at any great distance, as if nature had designed with kindly forethought to provide places, that might serve for a refuge to the weak against the violence of the strong.

Ascending the Versilia, at the distance of about a mile within the mountain district, you come to Seravezza, where the valley is somewhat widened by the confluence of another stream, descending from the Monte Altissimo. Here towards the close of September, Lambert had retired with Laodamia and Bindo; there was also with them Selvaggia, Fanfulla, Maurice and the little Arrigo.

The period that had elapsed since Niccolo's death to the present time, they had passed at Montemurlo, where we left Laodamia laid up with sickness; and where, in consequence of the terrible news of her father's execution, which they could not hide from her, she fell into the most imminent danger of her life; and it was only with some difficulty, that she could at the end of several weeks raise her head from the pillow. It was by very slow degrees, that she regained her strength; and her recovery was much retarded by the constant and depressing thought of her poor father, of her brothers whom she had lost in the field, and her country from which she was an exile. The sight too of poor Lisa, whom they had brought to her from Florence, distressed her more than anything else;—to see her in that hopeless condition, which separated them by an abyss, a hundred times more terrible than death itself; since it is far less miserable to mourn over a mind extinguished by death, with which we have lived in a long interchange of feelings and affections, than to see it degraded, a wreck and a ruin of its former self.—

Lisa's mental aberration was not of a violent character, and, apparently at least, not continuous. She passed hours, and sometimes whole days, in a deep and taciturn melancholy, sitting quite still; her eyes distended wide, and bent to the ground with a fixed, immoveable, and (if we may be allowed the expression) stony gaze; ever and anon the words would fall from her lips, in a low pensive tone: "He was a traitor then!" At times too she appeared to recognise particular persons, and to understand what was said; but these lucid intervals were but as flashes of lightning in an ocean of darkness. As however in her manner, there was nothing calculated to alarm them for her safety, she was left pretty much to herself; except that a little country girl was appointed to keep an eye on her, whenever they succeeded in inducing her to go out; for a physician, whose advice they had asked, directed, that she should be as much as possible in the open air, and especially where the scenery was interesting and beautiful.

One day, with that artful cunning, which in maniacs often survives the loss of reason, she succeeded, whilst abroad with her attendant, in sending her out of sight for a few moments. When the little maid returned to the spot, where she had left Lisa, the latter had disappeared; and though she ran about in all directions to look for her, yet she could discover no trace of her; and at last was obliged to return home, in the greatest distress, to inform the family; when they all, except Laodamia, sallied forth in the greatest alarm to search after the poor fugitive. They scoured the woods and dells around the castle, and kept calling her by name; minutely examining every hedge and bush, and clump of trees. It was all in vain. And it was only when night had set in, that, melancholy and dejected, they returned homeward; and for all their repeated researches, on several following days, they never succeeded in discovering what had become of her.

But a letter written about that time by Vanni, the house-steward of il Barone, to Baccio Valori, will give some information respecting her to the reader, and for this reason we give it entire.

" To the most noble Signor Baccio, my honoured " lord.

" Since the last letter I despatched to you, by " the courier Cecco, in which, as it was my duty, " I sent you word respecting the gentlemen that " came here according to your directions, and who " disappeared without either myself or anybody in " these parts, being able to give any account of the " manner of their departure, even to the present " day, I have not failed in doing my utmost, to " execute your commands; but hitherto I have " not succeeded in learning anything of Sir Troilus, " whom no one hereabouts has ever seen; though " it seems a thing impossible, unless he fled through " the air, but that some one must have seen him.

"Yesterday, upon going into the castle, where "I had not been since the day they came to us, "whilst I was opening the windows to let in the "air, with a view of keeping your Excellency's "things in proper condition, as my duty is, I "came to the yellow chamber, and, on opening the "door, it seemed like entering a tomb, from the "horrible smell of a dead body which filled the "room, so that, to escape infection, I was obliged "to set open the doors, windows, and everything. "And from searching to see whence this foul smell "proceeded, I found that it came up from the "hole of the trap-door, which is by the side of the "bed, as your Excellency knows. I ran for a "rope, and having fastened a light to it, I let it "down, but I could see nothing, owing to the "great depth of the hole; and also, because the "light went out before it had got down twenty "yards. Had the place been more within reach, "I would have tried to find who had been thrown "down, but to ascertain this, it would be necessary "to break through walls and vaults, for I know of "no other means. Therefore I await your Excellency's commands.

"Whilst I was occupied with this business, being "all alone in the house, I heard footsteps at a "distance behind me, and upon turning round, I "saw a young woman rush in, all wild and disordered, and I saw at a glance that her brain "was turned. She was a very comely lass, and "appeared to be a lady; she overwhelmed me "with a heap of absurd ravings and nonsense, just "as mad people do, and wanted me to tell her "where *that traitor* was; and one moment she "scolded, another she cried, and was so earnest "and pressing, that I had very great trouble in "ridding myself of her worry. Who she was, or "who this traitor was, I have no means of telling "you; for after a while she went off in the same "way she had come, wherever her mad fancies "took her, and the shepherds here say, they saw "her going over the mountain yesterday evening, "at nightfall; and upon attempting to stop her, "she defended herself with her nails, and made "them leave her alone; and they further say, she "set off running, and made for the woods. God "grant she may have met with no mischief, for "not a few wolves prowl round about these hills. "So no more at present, but to commend myself "humbly to your Excellency.

"Il Barone, this day of——August, 1530.

"*Your servant,*
"VANNI."

Baccio Valori, who had suspected that some ill end had befallen Troilus, and had indeed pretty well guessed the authors of it, without experiencing, as will readily be believed, any very lively affliction in consequence, thought it best not to look any closer into this matter, satisfied with having one creditor less, without seeking to learn how or whence this advantage had accrued to him.

He wrote to Vanni, directing him to have a couple of loads of quicklime thrown down the trap-door, to leave the windows open until the smell had gone, and not to trouble himself about the matter any further. Such were the honourable obsequies of Troilus, and here his history finishes.

Poor Lisa's history finishes here also; for neither her family, notwithstanding their long and patient researches, nor any one in that part of the country, ever heard any tidings of her end.

Did she die of want in some unknown solitude? —Was she the food of the wolves alluded to by Vanni?—We shall know at the day of judgment. —But if we fail of certainty on this point, we are, at any rate, able to offer a conjecture as to her probable fate; and with our patient and courteous reader, who having accompanied us all this way, we may now consider as an old friend, we wish to have no secrets, and to practise no reserve.

In the year 1580, that is, fifty years after the siege, some hunters, when exploring the hills that surround San Marcello, came to a retired spot concealed amid arid rocks, full of stones, wild and rugged, where many a cavern is formed in the mountain's side, though where they lead to, is not known. In this solitary place, even to this day called Macereto (probably on account of the macerie, or stone heaps which here abound) these hunters found an old woman, clad in the most wretched clothes, not, however, dirty or tattered like those of an actual mendicant. Her hair all loose and dishevelled, and reaching down to her knees, hung about her, and covered her whole body as it were with a silvery veil. Her face was pale and haggard; her eyes were constantly bent to the ground, and her whole expression dejected and woebegone. She was on her knees at the entrance of one of those caverns, before a cross rudely formed of two chestnut boughs, tied together by an osier band. She did not stir nor turn round at their approach; and as they stopped to look at her with mingled feelings of reverence and surprise, they heard her say, every now and then, with a deep sigh: "O God! O God! All these years have I been weeping for him!—Thou wilt pardon him—wilt thou not?——" Then, stopping for a minute or two, she again repeated her prayer, and always in the same words. Upon their return, they enquired her history of the country people, from whom they learnt, that by most persons she was looked upon as a saint; but no one could tell who she was, or whence she came. They said, that after several vain attempts to induce her to come and live amongst them, they had fitted up a small bed for her in her cavern, and different persons, from time to time, took her what food she required.——At last, one day they found her lying upon her bed, white and cold as alabaster; and when they were satisfied that her spirit had passed away, they buried her in the churchyard of San Marcello. Whether it was from her example, or whatever be the cause of it, ever since, some one has made that cavern their residence; and at this day, two poor old women lead there a lone and solitary life.

Whether this was poor Lisa, we cannot take upon ourselves to assert. But supposing it was; what must have been the strength of that poor girl's love, if, after so many wrongs, and so many sufferings, after losing all, even her reason, her love for him who had so cruelly deceived her alone remained unchanged and unimpaired in her heart; so intense, that even in her latest years, and to her last breath, when she could do no more,—she prayed and wept for him! . . . .

. . . .

In the early part of October, Lambert, who might now be said to be the chief and guide of his party, had thought it expedient to remove with them from Montemurlo, where, owing to their near neighbourhood to Florence, and their fears of the new government, they lived in constant danger. He made his way with them to Seravezza, not without great suffering on the part of Laodamia, to whose tottering health the misfortune of Lisa's disappearance had given a terrible shock.—It is the sublime gift of souls truly great and noble, that they can preserve a calm tranquillity even in the most terrible trials. This peace of the heart, which the envious impotence of vulgar spirits confounds with apathy, was the cause of Laodamia's still living on, and enabled her gradually to recover her strength, and we may truly say to return to a second existence.

In the house where they now dwelt, which was one of the first as you entered the town on coming from Ripa, they all lived in tolerable comfort, resting after all their troubles, and enjoying that calm retirement and repose of domestic life, away from the world, which is so soothing to the afflicted, and which is, indeed, to every man, the highest summit of felicity.—But to how few is granted the opportunity of enjoying it!—The sweets of this kind of life could not however induce Lambert and Bindo to forget the glorious thought of their country, the last words of Niccolo, and the oath they had pronounced over his grave. They had hardly settled their private affairs, when they began to think in what way they could best cooperate in their grand design of restoring liberty to Florence. In the first shock of so heavy a downfal, the banished Piagnoni, dispersed in the various cities of Italy, were some time ere they could renew their hopes, and venture upon forming plans for the future; just as when a thunderbolt bursts, people for some moments stand in a state of stupor, before they dare look at one another again. They soon however began to meet and confer, as well as to correspond by letters, and to weave that tissue of separate, feeble, and unconnected enterprises, which, instead of bursting the chains of Florence, served but to rivet them. It was resolved by these two, to keep on the track of, and to share in any movements that might take place; and they settled for Lambert to remain at home, and for Bindo to go and visit those Italian cities where the greatest number of refugees were collected; and wherever he found a favourable opportunity for action, he was to inform Lambert of it, who was sure not to fail of being wherever duties more sacred than those of a domestic nature, might summon him. Bindo set out accordingly, accompanied by Fanfulla, who having had some experience of monastic life, had no desire to return to it.

Since we are on the subject of these two of the principal personages of our story, we will mention briefly (without minding our being obliged somewhat to anticipate the date of events) all we know of their future history, to save our having to break the thread of our narrative, which is now almost at its close.

In all the negotiations, attempts, and enterprises, by which the Florentine outlaws strove to change the political condition of Florence, even to the taking of Sienna in 1555, when all hope was for ever extinguished of casting off the yoke of the Medici, Bindo took an active part, with that entire forgetfulness of himself and of his private interests, and with that inflexible energy, which rendered him an exact and living portrait of his father Niccolo. In 1535, he was at Naples with the chiefs of his party, who were met there to demand of Charles V. the observance of the terms of capitulation, when Florence surrendered. The Emperor listened to their statement, which was set forth by Nardi the historian, in a long oration. He also listened to the reply of Duke Alexander. He gave fair words to the exiles, but decreed in favour of the duke ; stipulating, however, for some conditions, by which they could return to their country.

The spirited and magnanimous reply of the exiles, will serve for an example, to all time, to those who may be in a similar condition.

" We did not come here," they replied, " to " demand of your Imperial Majesty, on what con- " ditions we were to be subject to the Duke Alex- " ander, nor to obtain, through his mediation, " pardon from himself, for what we have justly " and voluntarily done on behalf of our country's " liberty ; nor to return slaves to that city, from " which, not many years ago, we went forth free, " in order to obtain the restoration of our property. " But we have referred ourselves to your Majesty, " confiding in the justice and goodness of your " heart, that you may be so gracious, as to restore " that complete and actual liberty, which by your " agents and ministers, in the year 1530, it was " promised us in your name, should be maintained. " Wherefore, seeing that more regard is had to the " satisfaction of the Duke Alexander, than to the " just merits of our cause ; that there is not so " much as any mention made of liberty, scarce " any of the public interests, and that even the " restitution of the exiles is not granted freely and " unconditionally, and without any restrictions, " just as if it had been asked as a favour ; we can " make no other reply, but that we are all resolved, "rather to live and die free, as we were born: "and never, for any private advantage, to stain the "loyalty and honour of our hearts, by failing in "that love and duty, which are justly required of "all good citizens towards their native land."

Varchi adds (from whom we have transcribed the above reply, in an abbreviated form) "——and "it was a very remarkable circumstance, that none "of them would accept the favour proffered them "by the Emperor, of returning to their country, "of being reinstated in their possessions, and enjoying those honours and dignities which their "fellow-countrymen were enjoying at that time, "although the greater part of those exiles were "enduring great hardships and poverty, etc."

The negotiations being broken off, they had recourse to arms, and (the Duke Alexander having been killed by Lorenzino) they attacked Cosimo his immediate successor, under the leadership of Piero Strozzi, a brave, but unfortunate commander, who was defeated at Sestino, and at Montemurlo (where Baccio Valori and Filippo Strozzi were taken prisoners), and lastly, was totally routed by the Marquis of Marignano, at the battle of Marciano in the territory of Siena.

Bindo and Fanfulla, the latter now an old man upwards of sixty, and the former a man above forty, who had so long shared each other's good and evil fortune, hopes, fears and dangers, and strongly attached, as men are wont to be, who have traversed together so chequered a path; both died, the first in battle, the latter, the night before. Of Lambert, who was with them, we shall speak presently, when we come to detail the latter events of his life.

The moment therefore is now come, when we must part, and for ever, from the kind-hearted and excellent Fanfulla. Perhaps to the reader, who has not been acquainted with him, and had him in his heart, as we have, for so long a time, and who cannot imagine, for all we have said of him, what goodness, what integrity, what greatness of soul dwelt beneath that somewhat rugged and eccentric exterior, this separation will perhaps seem no great matter.—If so, I am sorry for thee, poor Fanfulla, that thou wert not known to those, who could have worthily described and made known to the world thy virtues; and that I, who did know thee, could not describe them as they deserved! And, what is still worse, this regret will be the cause, why in recounting thy last end, I am less than ever able to find a suitable style and language for the purpose. And yet, to pass it over, is impossible!—To escape from my perplexity, I transcribe a letter written to Lambert by his servant, Maurice, from the desert of Vernia, whither he had retired to bewail the death of Fanfulla, of which, as appears from his own confession, he was the involuntary, but not altogether innocent cause.

" From Fernia—3d day Oct. 1555.

" My lord and master.—Poor Mauritz is now " come with his knees on the ground, and his "arms across, and ask parton and pity of his "master, which he teserve not; put poor Mauritz "hafe so creat crief, that he no sleeps, no eats, and "must ever ever do penance, and hafe sworn no "more to trink fine, and pray God to die soon, "put he cannot die, unless his master says :—Poor "Mauritz, me hafe you partoned.

"I vill now tell you all, the vere truth, as the "sat misvortune hath appened, that Got and master "Lampert may parton poor Mauritz, and see that "he hafe no acted with caitiff intenzion.

"Your highness my master must know then the "night pefore the pattle of Marciane, me vas with "poor olt Fanfulle far away from the quarters on "duty as sentinels, and me say to Fanfulle: Fan-"fulle, me hafe much desire to confess my sins, "pecause me hafe tought in tream to die to-morrow "in the pattle; and Fanfulle answer; me hafe the "same desire; but here pe no priest nor friar. Me "found then a remety,* and say: thee confess to "me, and me confess to thee; and Got be willing "to accept our goot intenzions; and so we did. "Me first confess to goot Fanfulle, all my sins "which pe many creat ones; and Fanfulle for "penance give with the staff of his halpert many "hard plows on my shoulter; and me say: Pa-"cience, me deserve much harter. Afterwards "goot Fanfulle confess to me all his sins, even

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* Among the soldiers of that period were many religious scruples of this kind. When a man was mortally wounded, for instance, his too zealous comrades used to fill his mouth with earth, to supply the place of the communion.

" from when he a little boy, which lasted more
" than two hour, pefore he was done; and then
" me think Fanfulle hafe done much more wicked-
" nesses than poor Mauritz; therefore he deserve
" punishment much harter with the staff of the
" halpert, and me gave, with great tesire to make
" him suffer; and Fanfulle for some time hafe
" patience; then he hafe no more, and give creat
" blows to Mauritz, and poth lost their temper,
" and had much anger, and poor Mauritz have
" caitiff misvortune, for he not see, in the dark,
" that he strike goot Fanfulle on the head, and he
" fall to the ground and say: Goot Mauritz, thee
" send me to Paradise and me thank thee; and
" goot Fanfulle say no more, for he lay dead,—
" and me weep, and weep and ever weep, till my
" master hafe me partoned, etc. etc."

The corpse of Bindo, who was killed, as we have said, in the battle, was honourably interred. Upon stripping it, they found in his bosom a long bunch of snow-white hair; it was his father's, which he had always worn, as a memorial of the oath he had taken over his tomb. It was dyed with his blood, and attested his inviolable fidelity. The countrymen who buried his body showed their respect for this memorial, by placing it on his bosom, before they filled in the grave. . .

. . . .

In order to relate these last events we have been obliged to anticipate a period of five-and-twenty years. Having now to inform the reader of what befell Lambert, and also the two females, we must return to the time, at which Bindo quitted Seravezza.

After a long series of misfortunes, of troubles and sufferings, which had lighted on Selvaggia, Laodamia, and her affianced husband, it seemed at last, as if fortune was about to give them a respite. Their present state, the quiet of the spot where they had taken up their abode, all seemed to promise peace and tranquillity. But these promises were fallacious; peace was still far from their harassed and troubled hearts.

The reader who will find, we fear, our story already over long, will be thankful that we are not going to lengthen it, by describing too minutely their various feeings. Besides, he can very well imagine them from the preceding narrative; and few words, therefore, will suffice on this point.

The conduct of Selvaggia, and her services had been such, that it never could have occurred to any one, and certainly not to Laodamia and Lambert, to find another home for her, or to deny her the sole reward, which had been the object of all her long and painful sacrifices, the happiness of finding, at last, some heart to care for her. This happiness she was now having some taste of; and that, too, with that feeing of indescribable delight, which compensates ardent souls for that excess of pain and sorrow, which is the portion assigned them by Providence. In the transporting joy of a state so new to her, and thinking she had attained to what she could scarce have ventured to hope, she thought the happiness of her life would consist in her always seeing Lambert, and in enjoying the friendship and tenderness of his wife and himself. All this was paradise compared with the abject misery of her former life. She resolved never more to leave them. Lambert and Laodamia gladly acquiesced, and promised ever to regard her as a sister; and all three thought they had formed a delightful union, and one that would tend to the happiness of all.

To what mistakes is our good heart subject (which is, notwithstanding, a divine and glorious thing) if reason and experience do not act as its guides! This truth will require no illustration for any reader who has seen barely five-and-twenty years.

Matters went on very well for some time. But after Bindo's departure, the three who were left at home, coming into more intimate and immediate contact, began, by degrees, to experience in their mutual intercourse a feeling of restraint altogether new, more felt than admitted or explained to their own hearts, but which will be readily understood and explained by the reader.

Selvaggia still continued to love Lambert; and the delight of constantly seeing him, which at first seemed to her quite sufficient to make her happy, had become in a short time almost a torment, owing to that necessity of progress, which is inherent in the very nature of love.

In Laodamia's open heart there was no room for that jealousy, which springs from suspicion and distrust, and which equally demeans both the person who entertains it and the one who gives any motive or pretext for it. But she could not be blind to Selvaggia's beauty, nor deceive herself with regard to the feelings, that her misfortunes and the generosity of her continual sacrifice would naturally give rise to; so that the heart of Laodamia was ever beset with a timid, painful, and indescribable anxiety. Too penetrating, not to divine the secret pangs which Selvaggia endured, too humane to leave any means untried to render them less distressing, she was at a loss when they were all three together, to know what manner to adopt towards Lambert; she was always afraid lest their mutual interchange of affection should be too apparent; sometimes she even fancied that Selvaggia must hate her; that she did hate her; at other times, there would flash a doubt across her mind, that Lambert's love might possibly either grow cold or change; and if, on that point, she was wrong, her doubts would not appear so entirely unreasonable to one who should judge from appearances only.

In Lambert's heart there was not a single thought or feeling, that was not for Laodamia; but it was just because he did love her so much, that he was so severe, nay, so unjust a judge with regard to himself; thinking that he could not entertain any sentiment of affection or gratitude for Selvaggia, without profaning his love for Niccolo's daughter. When in company with them both, he was constantly afraid, lest by a look, a gesture, or a word, directed to Selvaggia, he might in any way wound the feelings of Laodamia; from whence arose a sort of restraint in his conversation and manners, which might easily mislead, and be attributed to any cause but the right one. Whether the society of persons so situated could admit of that freedom and intimacy, which is its first and most indispensable requisite, let my reader judge.

They had, however, one subject of discourse, on which, as on neutral ground, their minds could dilate; and that too, without the intervention of any secret and painful associations. That subject was religion.

Lambert and Laodamia, by that tendency, inseparable from all deep and sincere persuasions, were exceedingly anxious, that Selvaggia should become a Christian; nor did it require much trouble on their parts to induce her to take this step. Was it conviction? Was it a desire to adopt the same faith that Lambert professed? Was it the effect of that restless need of change, which is natural to suffering and afflicted souls? God only knows, how this may be; but however it was, Selvaggia received the rite of baptism, and heartily adopting the new faith, followed the practices, the precepts, and the principles of her new religion, with the natural ardour and impetuosity of her character. But if she had changed her mode of faith, she could not, in like manner, change the affections of her heart.

The illness of Laodamia, and the troubles and afflictions which had been the cause of it, had hitherto been an obstacle to the gratification of Lambert's most ardent desire, which was to be able to call himself the husband of her, to whom he had given the bridal ring in St. Mark's. Just now every impediment seemed removed, and the young man, with the warmest entreaties, began to urge Laodamia to appoint a day for their union. This however, it seemed she could hardly bring herself to resolve upon ; and in reply to the impassioned persuasions of her betrothed, she appeared reserved and hesitating ; and at times could hardly refrain from tears.

Lambert knew not what to think of this unusual behaviour ; and one day, throwing himself at her feet, he conjured her to relieve him of this tormenting doubt and uncertainty, and freely to open her heart to him, as was due to one, who loved her so dearly. They were in the house together, at the dusk of the evening. Laodamia, without answering, rose up, and giving her hand to Lambert, led him out. They proceeded in silence down the pathway, which leads towards Ripa, along the shady banks of the Versilia ; and having reached the spot, where the stream dividing into two branches, embraces a small islet, that abounds in willows, poplars, and hazel-trees, they made their way across to it, by means of large stones, which being disposed in a row, bridge the stream ; and going along a narrow path, they came to an arbour formed by the over-arching boughs, beneath which were some rudely-constructed seats. When here, Laodamia said:

"I have brought you to this retired spot, because what I have to say to you, is of the greatest consequence; and I wished to be quite sure of not being heard, or interrupted by anybody; promise me therefore that you too will not interrupt me."

Lambert, surprised and almost alarmed, gave her his promise accordingly, and Laodamia went on to say: "The love I have for you, Lambert, was blessed and sanctioned by my father Niccolo; I need not therefore blush to confess it to you; it is sincere and deep, and for that very reason, has more care for your happiness than for my own. You know, Lambert, I am not the only one who loves you. My beauty, if I ever had any, trouble and sorrow have withered and blighted. I have never had the opportunity of encountering dangers, sufferings and hardships, or of shedding my blood for you.—Oh, would that I had!—I have had no opportunity of showing myself great and generous like her"—(It is scarcely necessary to say, that Lambert was every moment testifying by signs of impatience, how desirous he was of interrupting Laodamia, who by her looks and gestures constantly reminded him of his promise.) "All this I am well aware of.—But, Lambert, remember, I told you, when first you spoke to me of love—I could renounce your love, but not share the slightest fraction of it with another! –She, I know, may once have been unworthy of a single thought of thine—but repentance possesses a renewing power, and has the virtue to renovate the soul and to restore it to its primeval dignity.—Doth not God open the gates of Heaven to repentance? I cannot bear to look upon her, and see her so miserable on my account.—If by-and-by, in the course of time, you also should become—oh! it would be too heavy a grief for poor Laodamia.—Let me seek repose in God and in the thought—that you are happy—"

Lambert had, up to this moment, restrained the impulse he felt to throw himself at her feet, restrained more than anything by the delicious pleasure of contemplating, without a veil, this creature of paradise; but now he could forbear no longer, and with his head bent low as the border of her robe, which he kissed a thousand times, his heart suggested language worthy of her who heard it, and worthy of his love; language, that dissipated every doubt, overcame every fear, and restored to the heart of Laodamia a serene and tranquil confidence, which diffused itself over her whole countenance, while placing her fair hand on Lambert's forehead, she said to him: "Well then, I am now yours for ever."

. . . .

Upon returning home (for by this time, it was quite dark) Selvaggia was not there. Late in the evening, a countryman brought them a letter; and upon opening it, they read the following words:—

"My last hope of obtaining peace is in that
" God, whom you have taught me to know. I am
" going to offer up my prayers to him, at his own
" sepulchre, in that land where he died for our
" salvation. I shall ever bear you in my heart;
" you, who alone in the world have loved me,
" and have given me all it was in your power to
" give; but this heart craved for more. I bless
" you; pray for me, that I may obtain peace from
" God, and an end to my sufferings; and I will pray
" for you, for your life, and for your happiness.

" *Your* Selvaggia."

. . . .

Two years after, Laodamia and Lambert were one evening sitting in their parlour; he was reading a letter from Bindo, and she had a cradle before her, in which there was sleeping a beautiful little boy of five months old, to which they had given the name of Niccolo; when a man presented himself and told them that a female had during the day landed on the shore, who appeared to be labouring under a fatal illness; that she wanted to make her way to Seravezza with all haste, but her life and strength failing her, and anxious to get there by any means, she had been obliged to be carried on a litter, hastily constructed of the boughs of a tree, with a large piece of sackcloth placed on it. Upon reaching the Madonna di Quercia, and feeling herself near her end, she had directed them to place her down at the church door, beneath some cypress-trees, and had sent to beseech Lambert and Laodamia to come to her as quickly as possible.

Both of them exclaimed at once: "It's Selvaggia." And eager to satisfy themselves on this point, mounting on horseback, they rode rapidly to the place mentioned.

The night was calm and serene; the moon shone bright and clear, projecting on the white front of the little church the dark shadow of the cypress-trees. At a distance they discerned the litter, and could see there was a female reclining on it; a priest stood by her side, and at her feet, a countryman was holding a lighted taper. They urged their horses on, and in another minute, they were both pressing in their hands the hand of poor Selvaggia, whom they could scarce recognise, so changed was she, and reduced to a shadow.

She turned her eye on Lambert and Laodamia; and her high and generous soul seemed to be transfused, as it were, into that last dying look. For a moment or two she spoke not, as if she were collecting the little strength she had still left, and then in a voice interrupted by the pangs of the death-struggle, she said: "I have—never found—peace—you know—never!—I felt—instead—death—in my heart—I was afraid—I should not—arrive—here—I have arrived—blessed be God!—bless you both!—who were the—only ones—that felt—pity for—the poor courtesan.—Lambert, place your hand—on my forehead—it was my last desire

—on the banks of Po—that night—call me thine—forgive me, Laodamia—but I love him now—as they love in Heaven——"

Lambert placed his hand upon the poor girl's brow;—it was cold, icy cold;—a faint smile played upon her lips—and death fixed it there.—Lambert and his wife wept long and bitterly over the cold and lifeless body of her, who deserved to have much forgiven, for she had loved much.—Shortly afterwards they buried her, with due and decent rites, in the village churchyard. . .

. . . .

For a long period the life of the two survivors passed amidst the agitation of continual and painful vicissitudes. A jealous guardian of his plighted faith to Niccolo, Lambert followed, with Bindo and Fanfulla, as long as they lived, the fortune of the exiles, and no less, after their death, did he pursue the same course; and so long as a sword was drawn in Italy against the Medicean dominion, Lambert's was always to be found in company with it. At last, every hope extinguished, exhausted with so many wars and battles, he retired with his wife to Genoa, and lived happy; that is, as far as he could, in this world; and above all, as far as one could, who was bereft of his country, and saw it miserable and degraded.

Here ends our story; in which, while narrating the misfortunes of a single family, we have aimed at describing those of many others, and indeed of a whole people.

Those who were more or less the immediate and guilty authors of the ruin of their country, did they obtain, at the price of so many tears, and so much blood-shedding, the end they had proposed to themselves? We shall see.

Clement VII., desirous of establishing the dominion of the illegitimate branch of the house of the Medici, to the prejudice of the other, which he hated, and from which Signor John of the Black Bands was sprung, effected quite the reverse; for he opened to this man's son the way to the supreme authority, which lasted in his line up to the middle of the last century.

Charles V., who, in hopes of transmitting to his son Philip the imperial crown, had wasted so much blood and treasure to consolidate his power in Italy, which united the two parts of his vast dominions, disappointed in his hopes, left to his son the dukedom of Milan and the kingdom of Naples; distant and dangerous possessions, which, on a fair estimate, cost Spain more than they brought her; and contributed, at last, towards utterly exhausting her resources in the long war of succession.

Whether the Florentines, who so long and so bravely defended their liberties against the usurpations of the Medici, succeeded at last in rescuing themselves, we have already seen. Did they deserve their fate? Shall we have the courage to say it?—yes; in part at least, they did richly.

They were for liberty for themselves, and all the while oppressed the cities under their rule; they set the Cancellieri and the Panciatichi of Pistoia to cut one another's throats, and caused the ditches of the Pisan lands to be filled up, so that, by the infectious vapours rising off the marshes, the population might be decimated, which, if too great, were likely to rebel; they were alive to their own interests, but were indifferent to those of others: they used two weights and two measures. The hour of danger arrived; the subject cities reluctantly cooperated in the defence of Florence, and only because forced to do so; her fall seemed to them a deliverance, the dominion of the Medici an equalising of them with their ancient and oppressive mistress.

The Palleschi and the Nobles, who, by their treachery in the last days of the siege, had looked to procuring the triumph of the oligarchical faction, found too late, that they had established the power of a single absolute ruler, who took from them their authority, and kept them down in an inglorious obscurity.

Baccio Valori obtained the reward due to traitors, namely, contempt from those for whose benefit he had practised his treachery, and universal infamy; and at last ended his career by the axe, under Duke Cosimo.

Malatesta too, branded as a traitor by all Italy, retired to Perugia, where he never obtained the power and advantages he had stipulated for with

Clement VII. Nay, circumvented and harassed by Cardinal Hippolytus, legate of the city (whom the Pope would not, or could not, restrain), who openly espoused the party of Baccio, Malatesta's enemies, he retired to a country-house of his, which, as Varchi says, he built more to while away his grief, than his time; and here, fourteen months after the surrender of Florence, his soul and body alike diseased, he departed this life.

Such is the way, in which the authors of so much misery attained the end they had proposed to themselves.

Were we not right then in informing our reader, by the motto of our title-page, that he would see, with how little wisdom the world is governed?

THE END.

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